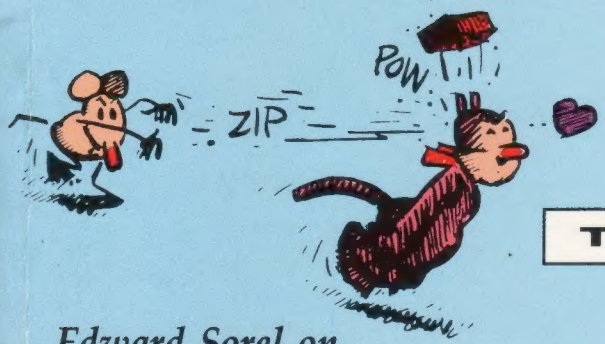

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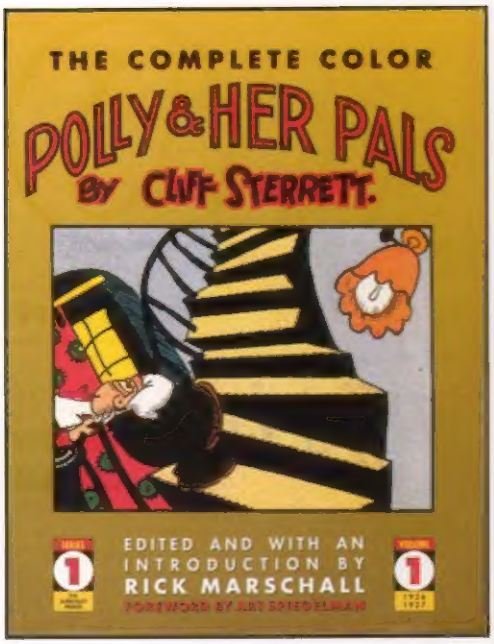
to Save Steve Canyon

by R.C. Harvey



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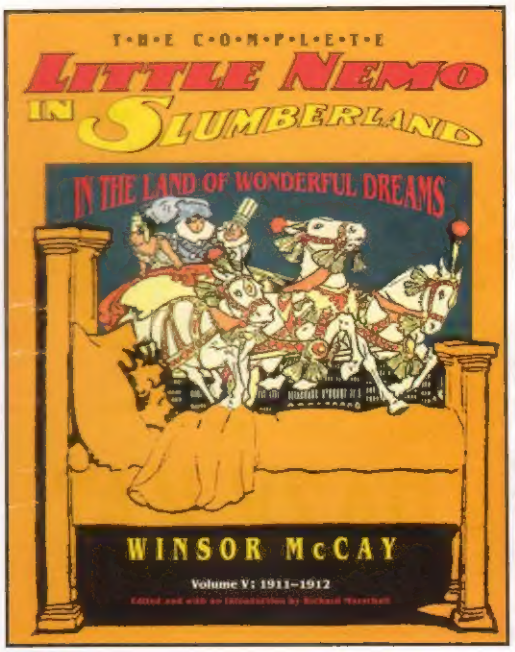

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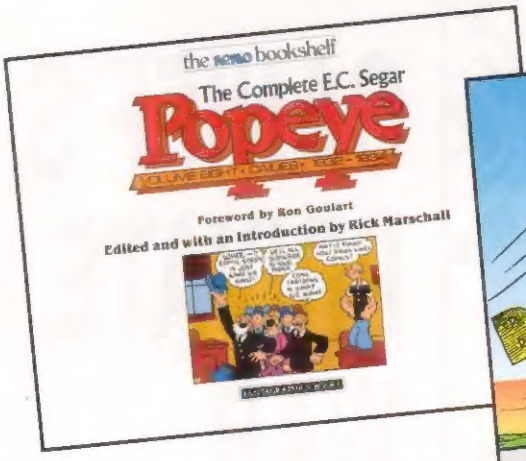
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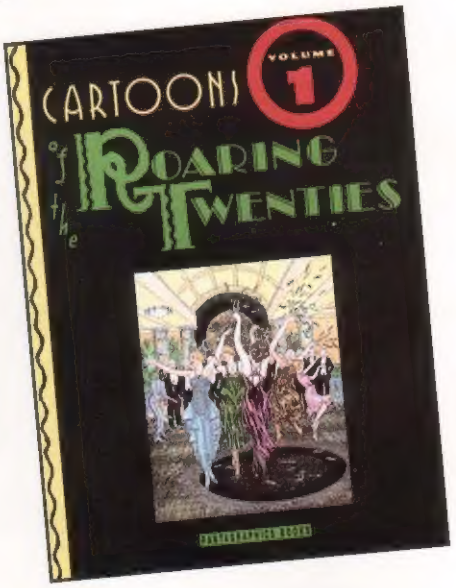

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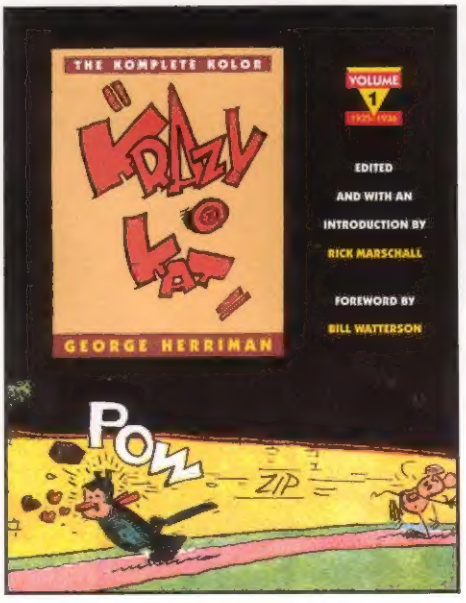

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FEBRUARY 1967
NORTH VIETNAM
SOUTH VIETNAM
LAOS
CAMBODIA
THAILAND
Demarcation Line
SON LA
BAC QUANG NINH
HOA BINH
HA TAY
HAI HUNG
THANH HOA
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HA TINH
QUANG BINH
QUANG TRI
THUA THIEN
HUE
DA NANG
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QUANG TIN
QUANG NGAI
KONTUM
BINH DINH
PLEIKU
PHU BON
PHU YEN
DARLAC
KHANH HOA
QUANG DUC
TUYEN DUC
LAM DONG
NINH THUAN
TAY NINH
PHUOC LONG
LONG KHANH
BINH DUONG
BINH THUAN
PHUOC TUY
GO CONG
KIEN GIANG
AN GIANG
CHUONG THIEN
BAC LIEU
AN XUYEN
Kompong Som (Sihanoukville)
Con Son (Administered from Saigon)

Caniff's Private War to Save STEVE CANYON

At the beginning of the 1960s the United States military and its self-appointed Kipling, Milton Caniff, were riding high. With the exception of Cuba the West had kept all its counters in the Cold War game, and unless it was necessary to poor-mouth it for campaign purposes, U.S. military superiority was uncontested. In the meantime, Caniff's *Steve Canyon* was appearing in an all-time high of 650 papers, making Caniff the equally uncontested maestro of the adventure strip. Surely neither institution expected to be brought low by a little brushfire war — 90 days, tops — in Southeast Asia.

Caniff found himself embattled on two fronts, both the increasing unpopularity of his point of view and the deteriorating status of the adventure and soap opera strips. With sizes shrinking, length of storylines being curtailed, and spare, sophisticated gag strips like *B.C.* and *Peanuts* being all the rage, the extended, oceanic narrative that was Caniff's trademark were ebbing away with the tide. But Caniff was never one to drift away without a fight, as is shown in this excerpt from R.C. Harvey's forthcoming authorized biography, *Meanwhile: The Life and Art of Milton Caniff.*

In February 1967, Steve Canyon gets a particularly nasty assignment. He has just returned to his base in Vietnam from Damma, where he and some Army engineers helped Princess Snowflower rescue her subjects from starvation by building a pontoon bridge across a lake. After the rigors of that job, Steve surely deserved a little rest and relaxation. Instead, he finds himself assigned to escort duty. And the personage he is to escort is a certifiable pain in the neck.

L. B. Lymph is a tyrannical taxpayer: a civilian with no official status in either the military or the government, he is nonetheless wealthy and influential enough to rate special treatment on his visit to South Vietnam. He had come to the war zone to see for himself what's being done with his tax money. But his inspection will scarcely be an objective evaluation: without having seen a thing, he knows that the Vietnam war is a monstrous boondoggle, a war game invented and being prolonged by "militarists" as "a breeding place for military promotions." Naturally peevish as well as prejudiced, he insults and abuses every serviceman he meets from the moment of his arrival.

Seeing Steve as he steps off the plane, Lymph tells him to carry his luggage: "Since you work for me and you don't seem to be out in the woods playing cowboys and Indians at the moment, you can carry my bags to the car."

Lymph's opinions and behavior are no surprise to Steve: he and everyone else in the armed forces know that "Laughing Boy" Lymph hates the military. So Steve is ready for him: ready to be civil and courteous but not ready to take abuse in silence.

As Steve loads his suitcases into the jeep, Lymph continues his abrasive tirade: "I don't sell anything to the Department of Defense, so I can say what I please to you unemployables in uniform."

"Yes, sir," says Steve. "That'll be one."

"One what?" says the puzzled Lymph.

"Article One of the Bill of Rights of the Constitution—your privilege to speak freely," says Steve, "which I have sworn to uphold—with my life if necessary."

When Lymph is told that he is not entitled to such perks as base exchange privileges or VIP quarters, he gets huffy: what, then, he wants to know, is he getting for his tax money? Steve tells him in a word: "Sleep."

Later on an inspection tour, Lymph declares: "This entire farce is a gigantic cops and robbers playtime for you militarists, and I do not intend to pay for adult toys."

"You make your point, sir," Steve says. "But it would be nice if, after we leave, the *kids* could play games without fear of stepping on Viet Cong land mines."

In the midst of this kind of verbal sparring, Lymph receives word that his daughter, Felicia, is being sent to him in Vietnam. Suddenly, the irritable tyrant is terrified. His daughter, we discover promptly, is a student activist, a war protester of the most virulent and vociferous sort. She has been expelled from college for starting a riot, and the university has agreed not to press charges on the condition that she leave the vicinity and that her father assumes custody of her. Since her father is in Vietnam, she is being shipped to him under arrest. En route, Lymph tells Steve, his daughter attempted to hijack the plane to take her to Hanoi. Felicia is clearly more than her father can handle. And he turns for help to Steve:

"As a citizen and a *heavy* taxpayer," he says, "I demand

..HOPE YOU ENJOYED YOUR TRIP, MISTER LYMPH!
IT WAS MISERABLE
YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN, OLD BOY!
I RADIOED AHEAD FOR A CAR! WHERE IS THE MAN FROM MY HOTEL?
MR. LYMPH, I AM COL. STEVENSON CANYON, U.S. AIR FORCE! I--
OH, ONE OF THE HEAVIER DRAINS ON THE TAXPAYERS' MONEY, EH?
WELL, SINCE YOU WORK FOR ME—AND YOU DON'T SEEM TO BE OUT IN THE WOODS PLAYING COWBOYS AND INDIANS AT THE MOMENT—YOU CAN CARRY MY BAGS TO THE CAR!
MILTON CANIFF
KENTON, DID YOU COME TO MEET ME IN THAT THING? I'LL TAKE A TAXI!
YES, MR. LYMPH! WE HEARD YOU WERE COMING TOO LATE TO BORROW THE GENERAL'S CAR! WE'LL CARRY YOUR BAGS IN THIS 'THING'!
—DON'T BE FLIP WITH ME, SOLDIER! I DON'T SELL ANYTHING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE - SO I CAN SAY WHAT I PLEASE TO YOU UNEMPLOYABLES IN UNIFORM!
YES, SIR! THAT WILL BE ONE!
ONE WHAT?
ARTICLE ONE OF THE BILL OF RIGHTS OF THE CONSTITUTION—YOUR PRIVILEGE TO SPEAK FREELY! WHICH I HAVE SWORN TO UPHOLD... WITH MY LIFE, IF NECESSARY!
MILTON CANIFF
Xe hai cho mirón

that you as a soldier defend me from my *child*!"

Because the girl has no passport, Lymph's must be amended to include her. And that makes her Steve's responsibility. Steve meets her flight, and she begins the usual tirade, calling him a hired killer, a baby bomber, and a war monger. But Steve is her rhetorical superior (as he was her father's).

When she tells him that she was expelled for protesting, Steve says: "I didn't get a college degree for the same reason: I stopped going to classes as a protest."

"You?" she says incredulously. "When?"

"On December 8th, 1941," Steve Deadpans.

On the way to her father's hotel, Felicia harangues every gathering of soldiers she sees: "Hey, you shining crusaders," she yells, "why should you go out and get shot at or ordered to slaughter babies, when the bright boys are back in college nuzzling your girls?"

The G.I.s, however, are so delighted to see an American girl that they ignore what she says.

When Steve and Felicia get to her father's hotel room, they discover that his visitor's visa has expired. Given his daughter's propensity to incite riots, the Vietnamese decline to grant her father's request for an extension. Lymph must leave the country immediately. Ditto his daughter. There are no civilian flights scheduled on this day, so Steve volunteers to fly them in a light airplane to a neutral country nearby. As they fly towards the border, they are hit by North Vietnamese anti-aircraft fire. Before they crash land, Steve manages to get off a radio message, but once on the ground, he can do no more: he's been hit and loses consciousness.

Two Viet Cong soldiers emerge from the surrounding jungle and take them prisoner. Felicia's protestations of sympathy with their cause carry no weight with the simple soldiers: in their culture, women have no opinions worth attending to. She and her father are required to carry Steve in a sling to some destination where they will all be interrogated. As they struggle through the jungle, Lymph shows his mettle. When Felicia drops with exhaustion, he assumes the burden for both of them, carrying Steve on his back. (And his daughter looks at him with open-mouthed wonder.) When the party stops for a rest, one of the soldiers warns Lymph to beware of the boob sticks (poisoned sticks concealed in the grass as booby traps for unwary enemies). Inspired, Lymph grabs two of the sticks and jams them into the feet of the two soldiers. As they hop around in pain, he picks up one of their discarded guns and shoots them both. Shortly thereafter, the

Milton Caniff stood for the mainstream view, reasonably confident that there was no other serious view worth troubling about.

Americans are rescued by a helicopter that Steve's radio message had summoned.

Steve recovers in the hospital. While there, he is visited by Lymph, who thanks him for "giving me back my child." Felicia was so impressed by her father's heroic conduct as a demonstration of his love for her that she has suddenly become a model of docile obedience. He acknowledges that his hatred for the military grew out of his being rejected by West Point, but things will be different from now on: "Now I intend to practice discipline at home and leave the soldiering to you professionals."

And when he gets back to his hotel room with Felicia, he tells her she has just enough time to take a shower before they must leave to catch their plane. She says only, "Yes, Daddy."

This was only Steve's third visit to Vietnam since the 1964 incident in the Gulf of Tonkin had drawn the U.S. into

STEVE CANYON
Dé Di-Dón
MILTON CANIFF
MISS FELICIA LYMPH! SO! IN LATIN YOU ARE 'MISS HAPPY WATER — NO?
HAW! THE YOUNG FASCIST KNOWS LATIN
OFFICER, I AM COLONEL CANYON, U.S.A.F.
I AM ESCORT OFFICER FOR HER FATHER, L.B. LYMPH...
AND SINCE HE HAS AMENDED HIS PASSPORT TO INCLUDE MISS FELICIA
—SHE HAS BECOME MY RESPONSIBILITY, ALONG WITH HER FATHER!
WHO NEEDS YOU, HIRED KILLER?
UNLESS YOU CAN SHOW ME HOW TO GET TO HANOI...
TO OBSERVE THE DAMAGE DONE BY YOUR U.S. AIR FARCE!
NOTHING TO IT, MISS LYMPH
...YOU START WALKING NORTH ON ROUTE ONE
...BEYOND THE LAST SENTRY YOU WILL BE CAPTURED BY THE VIET CONG
THEY WILL SEE THAT YOU ARRIVE IN HANOI—
FINK!
I WAS EXPELLED FROM COLLEGE FOR PROTESTING AGAINST SUCH CORN AS THAT FROM THE FACULTY!
OFFICIALLY THEY SAID IT WAS BECAUSE I DID NOT ATTEND CLASSES!
I DIDN'T GET A COLLEGE DEGREE...
FOR THE SAME REASON — I STOPPED GOING TO CLASSES—AS A PROTEST!
YOU? — WHEN
ON DECEMBER 8th, 1941!

active engagement in the conflict. On the previous occasions, his creator had assumed his usual posture: Milton Caniff stood for the mainstream view, reasonably confident that there was no other serious view worth troubling about. When Steve checks in with his superior in Saigon after his run-in with Queen Bay in December 1964, the general gives him a short version of the received opinion:

"This is the day's brainwash from the rice-paddy level," he says. "The Russian Reds hate the Chinese Reds, but they both hate *us* more. They'd gang up on us, come a showdown. If all Asia goes Commie, we'll be frozen out, just as Hitler tried to raus us out of Europe. Our business people can't compete with slave labor, so there would go our world trade."

It was another chorus in the old refrain, the same song Everett Dirkson was singing when he predicted a year or so later that if Vietnam fell, "the whole Pacific coastline" of the U.S. would be "exposed" to the onslaught of the red hordes. Thus, the same argument that had been advanced for venturing into Korea served to get us into Vietnam. No one questioned the efficacy of that proposition very loudly for some time. But by the winter of 1966-67, the antiwar demonstrations had become both loud and numerous—particularly on college campuses.

By the winter of 1966-67, Caniff knew he could no longer do a story in Vietnam without offending some of his readers. There was no longer a single mainstream of opinion for him to represent.

By the mid-sixties, 40 percent of college-age Americans were enrolled in college—over five million youths between eighteen and twenty-one; by the end of the decade, nearly seven million would be going to classes on the nation's campuses. Education had become the largest industry in the country. And students were the biggest single-interest group. These were the baby boomers, the largest generation of Americans ever. Because they were young they were idealistic, and because they were idealistic they became more and more incensed at their country's policy in Vietnam the more they learned about that backward land. Much of what they learned, they heard from the critics of war in Congress.

Although congressional critics were not, at first, very numerous, their numbers swelled as it became increasingly apparent that the South Vietnamese—the common people, not the politicians in Saigon—did not seem to want a war. Soldiers in the South Vietnamese army deserted at the rate of 15 percent. Wealthy Vietnamese youths bought their way out of military service. And the government was ousted by a new regime at depressingly frequent intervals. If the people of South Vietnam didn't want to fight in a war and if they did not support a government that wanted the war, by what right did the United States insist upon "helping" them fight Communism? Were we helping a people to achieve and preserve the right to govern themselves? Or were we pressuring them to do what we wanted them to do? To the largest single-interest group in the U.S., it began to appear that the United States was forcing the South Vietnamese to be the instruments of its economic imperialism. Being young and articulate, students voiced their objection to what they perceived as an immoral war.

The civil rights movement had vividly demonstrated the power of certain kinds of civil disobedience in the service of a moral cause, and the students now employed many of the same tactics. And that led them from draft-card burning to blocking the passage of buses bearing draftees away from induction centers, from making speeches at rallies to seizing and holding campus buildings in symbolic opposition to the war. Encouraged by many of their professors (for whom the tradition of academic freedom was license to tackle any problem regardless of their experience or expertise and whose tenure guaranteed immunity from official retribution), the largest single-interest group in the nation changed interests and left the classroom to take up marching in the streets. The longer the war dragged unsuccessfully on, the shriller the protests became, the more disorderly the demonstrations, the more destructive the students, the more unreasonable their demands. In their challenge of conventional wisdom about the war, student activists also defied conventional authority: soldiers now in a war of rhetoric, they created a counter culture, adopting life styles and attire that expressed

COLONEL CANYON, TELL THE GROUND BATTERIES NOT TO FIRE! IT'S ONE OF OURS!
DON'T WORRY, TERRY! THEY KNOW THERE IS NOTHING ELSE IN THE AIR QUITE LIKE PAN AMERICAN!
CANYON
U.S. AIR FO
GEORGE MUNDER
MILTON CANIFF
© 1968, Publishers-Hall Syndicate
DRAWING FOR THE FIFTH NATIONAL AIR FORCE SALUTE DOOR PRIZES WILL BE HELD DURING THE COURSE OF THE BALL

IT'S REAL TENDER! - HE KEEPS CALLIN' OUT HIS GIRL'S NAME!
MINI! MINI! MINI!
Best wishes to the TROOPS — from the INDIANAPOLIS STAR and NEWS... and from STEVE CANYON, — plus
MILTON CANIFF
CREW CHIEF - August 1967

their defiance—communal living, ragged and often dirty garments, long hair and beards.

Their protest did not grow entirely out of selfless idealism. Most male protesters were subject to being drafted. Understandably, no one wanted to die—or even be shot at—and certainly not in the jungles of Vietnam in the service of a cause the morality of which they now denied. Although all of them enjoyed a deferment as students, the prospects of eventual military service still clouded their futures and that of the women who would love and marry them. Then in 1966, deferments for students became harder to get. To keep up with the escalating need for more combat troops, Lyndon Johnson boosted the monthly draft calls to ten times their 1965 average of five thousand, and some of that new total had to come from the campuses. Student opposition to the war was fueled afresh by renewed protest against the draft.

Meanwhile, the campaign for equity for racial minorities was supplying new models for protestors. Civil disobedience had sown the seeds from which the summertime race riots had flowered in the fertile soil of the ghetto's mean streets. The pattern had been established in New York's Harlem and Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant sections in 1964, and the looting and destruction spread to dozens of cities that summer and for the next three. In 1966 alone, race riots had scarred the nation in forty-three major cities. Civil rights protest had escalated into outright lawlessness, and student activists would not be long in following suit.

Those in support of the war—even those merely loyal to their government in a general spirit of traditional patriotism—were dismayed by the rhetorical excesses of the young activists. And as the protests became fiercer and the arguments more unyielding, dismay turned to disgust, then hardened into uncompromising disapproval. The country was polarized into camps of doves and hawks. For a time, the division pitted the young against their elders. But before long, the ranks of the young protesters were joined by Americans of every age and station. And pronouncements from the opposing sides grew more strident and acrimonious.

By the winter of 1966-67, Caniff knew he could no longer do a story in Vietnam without offending some of his readers. There was no longer a single mainstream of opinion for him to represent. And as yet, neither side had emerged as the majority: as late as 1967, according to William Manchester in his narrative history *The Glory and the Dream*, even university faculties remained evenly divided on the question. For Caniff, there was no question at all on the matter of his allegiance, and as he saw the warriors in the field being condemned for the war, he took his hero back to Vietnam again, this time to say a word or two for those who were fighting the war.

The story of Steve's encounter with "Laughing Boy" Lymph and his daughter is noteworthy more for what it did not say than what it said. As grist for his mill, Caniff brought in the most inflammatory issues of the day and couched them in the most extreme terms imaginable—a war that was an immoral militaristic fabrication and protesting

youth who trampled on common sense and decency as well as ordinary patriotism. Having raised these issues, he then abandoned them and turned his story into a cautionary tale about parenting. Clearly, he did not intend to address the issues he raised: he raised them only to give Steve the chance to strike back in the name of all dutiful serviceman at the tormentors of the nation's military. And Steve does that with panache. He gets all the best lines, the snappy come-backs and put-downs that also remind us that regardless of the rhetoric stateside, men are still dying out here for the same old reasons—to guarantee the safety and welfare of loved ones back home. And Steve even manages to accomplish this without appearing glib: he seems instead only a man so thoroughly dedicated to his country's service that the fundamental reasons for his actions are always just on the tip of his tongue.

Acting with admirable restraint, Steve could be said to come off better in this sequence than his creator. Caniff's portraits of Lymph and his daughter are such broad one-sided caricatures that they reveal the considerable extent of his own testiness on the subject at hand. Felicia is so extreme in her fanaticism that she has no personal dimension whatsoever. And we are reminded twice that she is not only unkempt but unclean—and, in fact, that she probably refrains from bathing deliberately as an article of activist faith. In fairness, we must recall that the war protesters were just as one-sided in the prosecution of their program.

In resolving the conflict in his story, Caniff seems to suggest that the antiwar movement would never have come into being if parents had properly disciplined their kids. A simplistic view, surely, but not so far either from revealing a facet of truth. If we allow Caniff the tools of his craft—the shorthand stereotypes and symbolic language of the serial storyteller—then a rebellious girl in need of a strong restraining adult hand is but a metaphor for all self-indulgent youth. And considering that the antiwar movement faded away after Nixon eliminated the draft in 1973, much of the youthful protest was indeed self-indulgent. Still, even allowing for the kind of simplification necessary to create dramatic impact on the continuity strip's installment plan, Caniff's story has less dimension than his stories often have. Partly, that was a consequence of his maneuver to compete with television by shortening the running time of his stories. In this case, the narrative is only nine weeks long, and complexity and depth were among the first casualties the storyteller had to endure in stories that were streamlined through abbreviation to appeal to television audiences with their allegedly shorter attention spans. And then too, as I said, he hadn't intended to analyze the intricacies of antiwar sentiment: he intended only to lash back at critics of the war who, in his view, were forgetting the men in the trenches and what they were doing

The CANIFF YON Story...
STEVE CANYON
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TALE AND THE TELLER IS EASILY TRACED IN THIS INSTANCE.
CANIFF WAS BORN IN HILLSBORO, OHIO, NEAR DAYTON, WHERE U.S. MILITARY AVIATION WAS JUST BECOMING A REALITY...
THAT WAS IN 1907
...BUT BEFORE STEVE CANYON, CANIFF COVERED ALL THE USUAL PHASES OF APPRENTICESHIP IN THE CARTOONIST'S CRAFT— FROM FINGER PAINTING
DO YOU EVER NOTICE— SOME MEN WALK DOWN THE STREET— OTHERS JUST DRIFT ALONG
TO FIRST PUBLISHED DRAWING
THROUGH HI SCHOOL
- SCHOOL NEWSPAPER ... AND COLLEGE ANNUAL
FOLLOWED BY NEWSPAPER JOBS AND SUCH FEATURES AS..
"THE GAY THIRTIES"
"DICKIE DARE"
and "TERRY"
...CULMINATING IN THE WARTIME G.I. STRIP "MALE CALL" featuring "MISS LACE"
GROWING UP LISTENING TO THE SOUND OF AIRPLANE ENGINES MADE IT NATURAL FOR CANIFF TO EVENTUALLY DRAW A STRIP ABOUT A PILOT AND THE DANGERS HE MEETS (SUCH AS)
... HOW DOES A STEVE CANYON COME TO LIFE?
... HE WOULD BE TALL AND FAIR
WITH A LEAN, RUGGED FACE...
.. A DARK STREAK IN HIS HAIR THAT IS COPYRIGHTABLE
COOL BLUE EYES AND A FRIENDLY GRIN
PLUS A STRONG JAW—AS WE ALL LIKE OUR HEROES TO LOOK!
BUT WITH ALL THE FUN AND FEMMES, SUCH A STRIP MUST DO A PUBLIC SERVICE!... WHICH IS WHY CANYON WEARS AIR FORCE BLUE —TO HELP YOU REMEMBER THE GUYS WHO GUARD YOUR LIFE AT THE RISK OF THEIR OWN
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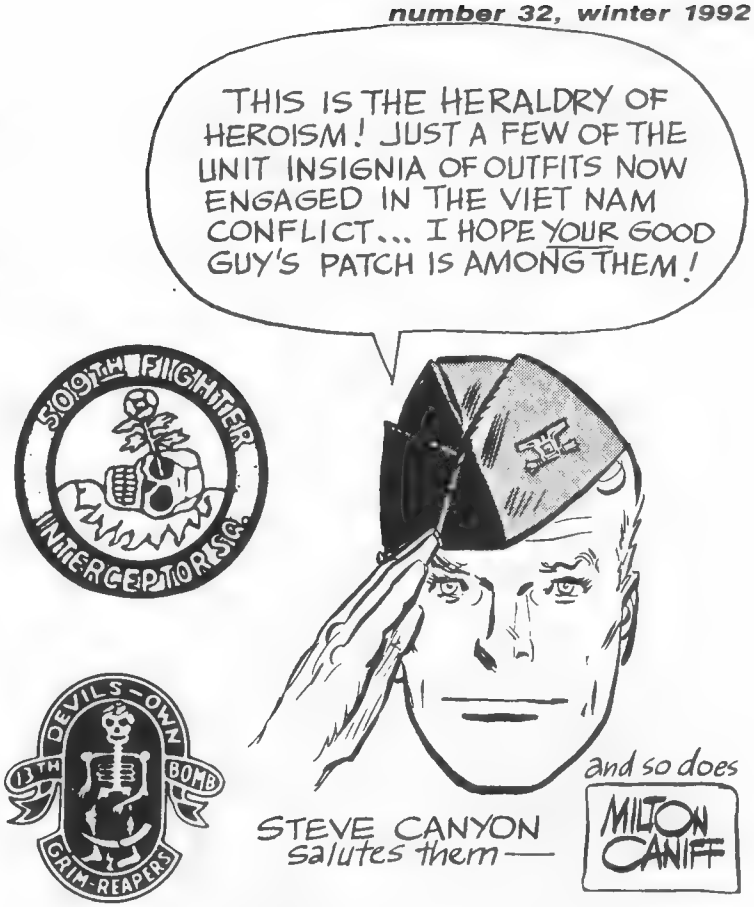
and feeling.

As he expected, Caniff heard proclamations from both sides of the argument in the wake of the story. His long-time fans and his followers in the military praised him. Some of those who were against the war wrote vehement letters of execration; but most of the young virtually ignored him. They'd struck him off their lists long ago as a war-mongering militarist: even if they didn't read his strip, they'd heard enough about him to know him. For the first time in his career, Caniff's reputation was beginning to work against him.

The editors of Canadian newspapers had always objected to the generalized "U.S. propaganda" in *Steve Canyon*, and once Caniff seemed to be supporting the Vietnam adventure, editors began cancelling the strip.


THIS IS THE HERALDRY OF HEROISM! JUST A FEW OF THE UNIT INSIGNIA OF OUTFITS NOW ENGAGED IN THE VIET NAM CONFLICT... I HOPE YOUR GOOD GUY'S PATCH IS AMONG THEM!
503TH FIGHTER INTERCEPTOR S.Q.
13TH DEVILS-OWN BOMB GRIM-REAPERS
STEVE CANYON salutes them—
and so does
MILTON CANIFF

The aftermath of the sequence was much more serious north of the border in Canada. Canadian opposition to U.S. involvement in Vietnam had made the country a safe harbor for the principled American youth, who took refuge there in droves to avoid the draft. The editors of Canadian newspapers had always objected to the generalized "U.S. propaganda" in *Steve Canyon*, and once Caniff seemed to be supporting the Vietnam adventure, editors began cancelling the strip.

The last straw for many Canadian editors was piled on during the sequence that ran in April 1968. The story focused on Doagie Hogan and his infatuation with a computer expert. Although it was set in Vietnam, Caniff didn't believe that it was Vietnam that triggered the final spasm in Canada. During the course of the narrative, he posited an experimental radar base in northern Canada where there weren't many people and therefore little chance that anyone would be hurt in the event of Russian retaliation. Caniff's radar base was entirely fictional, but that didn't matter to the Canadians. "They said whoever the enemy might be would take this literally," Caniff said, "and that would make Canada the target for an atomic attack." The *Toronto Star* cancelled the strip in May 1968. It was, according to Canadian Carl Horak, the last of the Canadian papers carrying *Steve Canyon*.

Caniff, an honorary member of the Royal Canadian Air Force, was sorry to lose his audience north of the border. He was also chastened. The loss of a couple dozen papers from a client list of over 600 was not in itself cause for alarm, but it was the first time he had lost significant numbers of subscribing papers. And most of them had cancelled for the same reason—Caniff's apparent support of the Vietnam War.

Caniff took a lesson from the Canadians. He de-emphasized the Vietnam war after May 1968. Steve still went to Southeast Asia on occasion, but not often, and when he did, the war itself was only a shadow in the background of the story's action. Caniff didn't know it then, but it was too late to make that kind of adjustment. The die was cast for Caniff: he had been thoroughly identified with the military for too long. He had not begun to lose papers in the U.S. in any great numbers yet, but it would be only a matter of time before the antiwar sentiment reached such a pitch of outrage that everything military would be condemned out-of-hand, *Steve Canyon* and Milton Caniff along with the entire armed forces establishment. All that was needed was sufficient impetus.

The tidal wave of emotion that would create that impetus began gathering force and volume with the Tet offensive in Vietnam at the end of January 1968. Militarily, the North Vietnamese attack on 36 of the 44 provincial capitals of the South was a failure. But the audacious fact that the attack was mounted and executed with such stunning precision and vigor in so many places at once proved that the enemy was not, as Lyndon Johnson claimed, struggling to stave off defeat. Many who had supported the war thus far were suddenly and dramatically convinced that the U.S. could not win this one. Irrefutably discredited, Johnson announced March 31 that he would not run for reelection. And after that, the center no longer seemed to hold. Catastrophe followed upon catastrophe as the nation went through an apocalyptic season in which visionary leadership was destroyed and faith in authority shattered. Student protest swept back and forth across the country that spring—221 major demonstrations on 101 college campuses. Buildings

were not just seized: they were defaced and dynamited. Records were damaged, obscenities were sprayed on walls and spat at policemen, college presidents and deans were roughed up and held hostage. The gray bastions of authority no longer intimidated.

TERRY, STEP UP HERE AND SAY HELLO TO YOUR FRIENDS IN THE E.T.O.
G'WAN, BURMA, I KNOW WHAT THOSE JOKERS WANT TO SEE... AND IT'S NOT ANOTHER 2ND LOO-TENANT!
for STARS AND STRIPES and the GEES in the EUROPEAN THEATRE
from MILTON CANIFF
N.Y. 1944

Less than a week after Johnson's annoucement, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, depriving the black community of its moderate leadership. Riots broke out in 168 cities. And a mere two months later, an assassin's bullet took Robert Kennedy. With those two deaths, youths black and white alike seemed to have lost their voices in the political process. Their link to the nation's power system broken, only violent protest seemed viable—and only as a way of expressing dissatisfaction and disillusionment. With that in mind, they went to Chicago for the Democratic National Convention at the end of August. And before they left the Windy City, Mayor Richard J. Daley's club-wielding storm troopers convinced them—and, more importantly, many of their elders—that the establishment was capable of abusing its authority in monstrous ways (just as the Tet offensive had convinced them all that the establishment was lying).

And then in March 1969, came the culmination of that chaotic season of blighted hopes, the My Lai revelation. If American soldiers had been so corrupted by the Vietnam nightmare as to be capable of the brutal slaughter of unarmed civilians, then not only was the Vietnam war immoral but the military mind was twisted beyond salvation. This realization confirmed a long-standing suspicion that the military could not be trusted. For months and months, generals had been promising that the end of the war was imminent; but the war went on. They had lied before about the strength of the enemy; they were doubtless lying now. And they had lied earlier to cover up the murderous rampage of William Calley and his men at My Lai. Clearly, the military mind was an aberration: soldiers liked to kill and would rather wage wars than win them.

Taking impetus from the trajectory of these horrific events, American public opinion was at last substantially antimilitary. And Caniff began to lose papers in consequence. His client list shrank steadily at first, not precipitously. There was no sudden falling off of subscribers; they drained away, bit by bit by bit, for several years. And then, all at once, they seemed to be dropping away in droves.

In notifying the Syndicate of their decision to cancel, some editors said they (or their readers) objected to the "Air Force propaganda" in the strip or to Caniff's being "hawkish on Vietnam." More frequently, however, editors simply cited reader surveys in which *Steve Canyon* ranked near the bottom. Caniff scoffed at most such studies of reader interest.

"Very often," he said, "their readership poll is the gent's room survey. An editor turns to the guy at the next urinal and says, Do you read this strip? And the fellow says, Well, my cousin Minnie doesn't like it. So out it goes. On that thin criticism, an editor will throw something out of the paper. Or when picking a new strip, they pass syndicate proofs around the city room. This, of course, is no place to take a poll of anything because the guy being asked has to go for what he thinks the boss wants him to go for."

All Caniff wanted was a fair trial, a chance with the real readers of the strip. "The best example of this kind of thing took place in Columbia, Missouri," he said. "Another strip was being considered by the paper, and *Steve Canyon* was going to be thrown out. Through some miracle of local loyalty or whatever, they decided to put it up for trial—that is, to show a sampling of the new strip and run a one-on-one poll. Well, *Canyon* won, eleven to one."

Although he believed that no newspaper had a proper way of testing the popularity of a given strip, he once noted that the *Philadelphia Inquirer* had at least a fair survey technique.

"On the ballot, they broke up the comics page. It was one of those questionnaires that asked which strip you want to keep in the paper and, if features are to be dropped, which ones you would prefer be dropped. Then—and this was a big break for us—they put the adventure strips in a separate category so you'd be competing only with other strips of the same sort instead of with *Peanuts* or *Doonesbury*."

Of one thing, though, he was certain: editors responded to their readers, and if readers objected loud enough when a strip was dropped, editors usually reinstated the strip.

"If it's a favorite strip of yours," he said, "holler immediately. Call the editor on the phone and give him hell. If you really feel this way about it, he'll listen to you. If enough noise is made, the feature will be put back in the paper. It happens all the time. But if no noise is made, editors think the public doesn't care. Unfortunately, sometimes the public does care but doesn't speak out. There are some people who read *Canyon* who wouldn't dream of writing a letter to the editor. They just aren't letter-to-the-editor writers. And this has cost me a lot of papers: when the chips were down, these people just didn't react. They have regretted it greatly and said so, but they didn't say it at the right moment and loud enough."

Caniff's client list shrank steadily at first: there was no sudden falling off of subscribers, they drained away bit by bit for several years. And then, all at once, they seemed to be dropping away in droves.

One of Caniff's most gratifying memories sprang from a cancellation that reader reaction had aborted in the 1950s. A paper in upstate New York notified the Syndicate of its intention to drop *Steve Canyon* but then withdrew the notice shortly thereafter. Caniff received an explanatory note from the paper's editor:

> *You may wonder what made me change my mind. When a memo went to the composing room about the shift, I immediately got complaints from the printers. I thought, if the printers felt so strongly, I must be wrong.*

Printers' opinions meant a lot to a printer's son. "It brought out all my professional pride," Milton said.

Caniff had accepted the occasional cancellation of his strip more-or-less philosophically without protest for most of his career. But as cancellations began to pile up in the wake of the Vietnam debacle, Caniff quickly resolved not to give up a single paper without a scrap. As soon as he received notice from the Syndicate that a paper was about to drop the strip, he marshalled his forces to object. And after more than three decades as a syndicated cartoonist, he could muster a lot of troops.

If the paper in question was in a city near any kind of military installation (and few cities of any size weren't)—preferably an Air Force base—Caniff wrote to the more influential of the officers he knew. When it came to the Air Force, his acquaintances among the top brass were legion. He routinely wrote to commanding generals. He also wrote to Air Force Association people, Sigma Chi fraternity brothers, members of the Civil Air Patrol, and anyone else he might know with influence in the area. The letters were all essentially the same: please help reinstate *Steve Canyon* by writing a letter protesting the cancellation of the strip.

Caniff's efforts to fend off the strip's ouster at the *Arizona Repulic* provide a good example of the sort of campaign he mounted. To fraternity brothers in the area, he wrote:

> *Dear Brother Muscenti:*
>
> *Word has just reached me that my* Steve Canyon *feature will soon be dropped from the* Arizona Republic.
>
> *My mail indicates that Sigma Chi and their families in your area identify with Canyon and find the strip a morale booster.*
>
> *After the strip has been dropped out of the paper, comment to the editor of the* Republic *by local people will carry a great deal of weight in re-establishing the feature.*
>
> *Gratefully and fraternally,*
> *Milton Caniff*

He wrote to Brigadier General Sanford K. Moats at Luke Air Force Base:

> *Word has come my way that the* Arizona Republic *is cancelling my* Steve Canyon *feature.*
>
> *I do not wish to involve you in all this, but, knowing that*

USAF personnel in any area receive inspiration and a moral boost from Canyon, *I would be most grateful if you would alert your good people to this impending cancellation.*

After the strip has been dropped out of the paper, comment by local people to the editor of the Republic *will carry a great deal of weight in re-establishing the feature.*

Caniff also wrote to Barry Goldwater, asking him to write the *Republic* to ascertain if Caniff's pro-military stance was what had brought on the cancellation. Goldwater did so, but managing editor Edward Murray assured him that Caniff's opinions had nothing to do with it. "It was purely and simply a question of slipping readership," he wrote. "His point of view, of which I thoroughly approve, had nothing to do with the cancellation."

The campaign did not get the strip's Sunday page reinstated in the *Republic*, but the daily strip continued to run in the afternoon paper.

When the Omaha *World-Telegram* moved *Steve Canyon* off the comics page to the classified ad section of the paper, one of Caniff's more knowledgeable fans became alarmed: such a move was often the opening gambit in an effort to ease a strip out of the paper by first hiding it from its readers. (In making it difficult for a strip's readers to find it, editors pave the way for declining readership; then they can justify canceling the strip by citing poor performance in reader polls.) Fan Jack Morgan protested to the paper and alerted Caniff, and Caniff wrote General Bruce Holloway, commander-in-chief of the Strategic Air Command at nearby Offutt Air Force Base, asking him to do what he could for the cause. Holloway phoned the paper's editor and was assured that the paper had no plans to discontinue the strip.

Sometimes Caniff won his fights. But increasingly as the 1970s rolled on, he lost. And often even his victories were short-lived.

At Caniff's request, Kay Brick, chair of the Powder Puff Derby, wrote a ream of letters herself to Ninety-Nines in Minnesota when the Minneapolis *Tribune* annouced that it planned to drop *Steve Canyon*. Letters from the women flyers deluged the paper. Meanwhile, Caniff wrote to Brigadier General I.G. Brown, director of the Air National Guard. Brown went into action and reported to Caniff:

Dear Milt:

Just had a visit from my contact, Brigadier General John R. Dolny, commander of the Minneapolis Air National Guard, who contacted a vice-president of a major TV studio, who in turn contacted a Mr. Bryon Hawthorne of the Minneapolis Tribune.

Statement was, "No problem, going to continue the Steve Canyon *strip."*

What next, Uncle Milt?

But a week later, Caniff was writing Brown again, this time about the impending cancellation of the strip at the Newport News *Press & Times Herald*: "I hesitate to come back so soon with another unhappy report, but you have been such a great help with my problems, I know you will do what you can."

When the famed Paris edition of the *Herald Tribune* dropped the strip, Caniff pulled every string he could to prevent the loss of the prestigious paper. He wrote Walter Annenberg, a long-time acquaintance, then Ambassador to Great Britain: "I do not mean to get you involved in this in any way, but if you feel inclined to do so, a query from you or from your press people would help clarify the situation." ("Clarification" was not exactly what the cartoonist wanted, but any note from Annenberg would exert pressure on behalf of the strip.) And he wrote Katherine Graham, publisher of the *Washington Post*, which owned a third of the *Herald Tribune*: "I never try to tell an editor how to run his paper," he wrote, "but I do not hesitate to contact friends in high places who have been kind as you have been to me over the years." Neither Annenberg nor Graham felt moved to help, though; and *Steve Canyon* stayed out of the *Herald Tribune*.

Sometimes Caniff won his fights. But increasingly as the 1970s rolled on, he lost. And often even his victories were short-lived.

"I fought every one," he said, "until the prairie fire took over. And then they were all in such trouble that it didn't help much any more. Although sometimes it did," he said, brightening at the recollection. "When the L.A. *Herald Examiner* dropped it, I wrote all my friends in the movie business. And they responded, too—'cuz they all realize more than most people about the importance of such things. Jimmy Stewart, John Wayne, Burgess Meredith—they all wrote letters. And the strip was back in the paper—damn soon—'cuz the papers out there are suckers for their own racket: they have great regard for the movie business. They know that's the principal industry in the damn town—so they listen to John Wayne. He wrote a hell of a letter," he smiled in recollection.

But by the end of the decade, the victories were few and far between. *Steve Canyon* was becoming another of the casualties of the war in Vietnam.

When he was first accused of being a hawk on the war, Caniff admitted it: "I guess there's some propaganda in between the bubbles of narration," he told a reporter from the *London Evening Standard* in May 1967. "My hero, being in the Air Force, can't be other than a hawk. It's just like Kipling and [George A.] Henty. I gobbled them up when I was young. It's exactly what they did whether they intended to or not, and let the fuzzy-wuzzies write their own stuff!"

But as the war wore on, hawks became harder to find in public, and Caniff was no exception. His comment in later years was still essentially the same, but he emphasized his role as a latter-day Kipling, and, taking refuge in his function as a storyteller of realistic tales, he studiously avoided committing to print a personal opinion on the war and its validity.

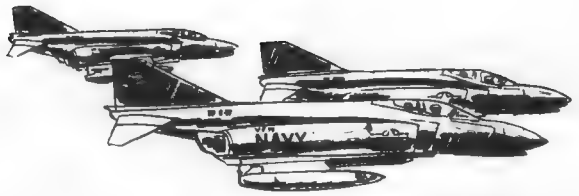
In those earlier stories set in Vietnam, he'd say, he'd simply been showing a military man in a military situation doing a military job. Whatever Steve had said was part of Caniff's portrait of that military man: Steve was merely staying "in character." But Caniff refrained from giving Steve any more ringing speeches that justified the Vietnam War as being integral to the security of the United States. The

MILTON CANIFF

reasons for our being there had nothing to do with his stories, Caniff would maintain; the fact was that our soldiers were there, they were sent there and they were doing their duty, and he didn't think we should turn our backs on our soldiers in the battlefield. He was doing no more than Kipling had done.

Years afterward, Caniff expanded on the idea: "Rudyard Kipling, in his stories about the British Army in India, didn't ever say that he was for or against the British occupation of India," he said. "He just told the stories of the people who were there, voluntarily or not. And that's what I was doing—telling stories about the guys out there being shot at. I talked about what happened to people—like the guy who knew nothing more about that rifle than that he could lie on his back and pull the trigger with his bare toes and he would hit the pilot and the plane would come down. It was the simplest kind of ground fire sharp-shooter. That's all he needed to know. I used that kind of thing. And didn't say why or hooray or damn him. It was just a fact. This was happening—these black pajama kids who knew nothing at all about weapons except which end was the trigger, and yet they were winning a war against us. I would try just to show it as it was in the dispatches or in the newspaper and not talk about the reasons for being there."

Caniff may have thought he was simply telling stories, realistic stories about seemingly real people; but the stories were not just stories. They were dramas with life-threatening incidents being surmounted by an admirable individual, a heroic figure. They were intended to entertain the reader by engaging his sympathetic participation. That Caniff told his stories realistically only made them more potent as vehicles for conveying opinions. Because we like and admire the hero, we believe in him and accept whatever he says as the truth. The more realistically his tale is told, the more convincing his truth. And so Caniff's contention that Steve is merely a realistic portrait of a military man doing a military job is



beside the point. The point is that the portrait is not a neutral abstraction: it is invested with life and heroic qualities. Under those circumstances, the portrait can be persuasive.

And Caniff shows us more than the portrait of a single man. He also shows us the world in which that man lives, and because that world was depicted realistically, its portrait, too, was persuasive. Canadian cartoonist and critic Arn Saba once provided a thumbnail sketch of the results as he saw them over the years:

> *Since the close of [World War II], Caniff's characters—first in* Terry, *then in* Canyon*—had been at times somewhat nostalgic for those days of high drama and clean-cut morality. As well, Steve Canyon's foreign escapades were placed very explicitly against a backdrop of the emerging Cold War in which once again it is easy to see Caniff's simplistic and reductionist view of political realities. Of course, in this he was, as usual, in tune with his public and his country. . . [When Steve re-enlisted in the Air Force], the strip became a vehicle for right-wing political views in that completely transparent and guileless way that Americans have of not even realizing that there might be any other point of view. As was true of American political attitudes during the Cold War, the values both stated and implied in the* Canyon *stories of the '50s and '60s are probably more indicative of almost unintentional cultural imperialism than of actual military expansionism. There is an assumption that native people of any land, given exposure to American values and American culture, will unfailingly be won over in a second. This is in fact as much of a fairy tale as the world of the original* Terry, *but since it was attempting to pass for reality, it became offensive. . . Paradoxically, however, this military-political focus gave* Canyon *the artistic cohesiveness that it had been lacking at first. Whether one agreed with him or not, Caniff was once again speaking from the heart, as he had done with* Terry, *and it is this which accounts for his ability to create so vast and full a world for his hero. Steve is alive for him, and his world was alive.*

As might be expected, I don't agree with everything Saba says here. I see Caniff as a mainstream moderate not a right-wing conservative: he scarcely approached Harold Gray's end of the political spectrum. (Saba dips a little too deep into the lexicon of post-Vietnam rhetoric to be completely accurate.) But as a brief (albeit slightly slanted) description of the reality that prevailed in Caniff's strips, Saba's analysis illustrates in detail the point that Mintz makes. And it also shows the effect of Caniff's portrait on a reader who is not entirely sympathetic with the point-of-view it represents (despite, in this case, Saba's admiration for Caniff's artistry). And during the Vietnam era, there were many such readers. It was not so much the isolated fact of Vietnam in *Steve Canyon* that aggravated these readers: it was the whole posture of the strip, the argument that they saw embedded in the portrait of the world displayed in Caniff's panels. Many could argue that it was just such a world view that had led to Vietnam in the first place.

Caniff was hardly ignorant of the propaganda power of his comic strip. Ever since becoming popular early in WWII (at least by then if not before), he had recognized the potency of the medium in explicit terms. Writing for *Vogue* in 1943, he

said: "The radio voice and the cinema shadow are infinitely persuasive. But they are ephemeral. A voice dies out of consciousness when it is stilled. Rarely does a film character survive the midweek change of bill. But. . .the comic strip character lives on and on, taps you on your shoulder more times than anyone in your life to whom you are not married. It has always amazed me that propaganda-conscious powers, like Russia and Germany, have never picked up the comic strip idea."

And he knew, too, that even Kipling's kind of story could be persuasive. "I remember reading about the horrors of British rule in India," he said in a conversation with Jules Feiffer in 1986. "Then I would read Kipling, and Tommy Atkins was a pretty nice guy. Tommy Atkins might wish he were elsewhere, too, but he's in the British Army and he goes where he's told. Kipling glorified the British colonial military. In the beginning, I never gave it a thought as to why they were all there. All I thought of was Gunga Din. This Kipling did with great skill. He had us pro-British in the First World War before we even gave it a thought."

Caniff also knew the practical limits of the comic strip as a vehicle for propaganda. In the *Vogue* article from which I just quoted, he pinpointed the central fact about the medium

When he was first accused of being a hawk on the war, Caniff admitted it: "I guess there's some propaganda in between the bubbles of narration."

that circumscribed its power. In calling the comic strip "the perfect transmitter of public pressures" and "more subservient to public pressures than those two other propaganda forces, the film and the radio," Caniff revealed its limitation. Because the circulation of a strip and therefore its success depended so greatly on popular acceptance, the comic strip must reflect the prevailing moods of its audience or die.

And in the years after the apocalypse in 1968, he learned the bitter accuracy of that assessment.

That the mood of the country had undergone a profound change in the sixties was certainly apparent to Caniff toward the end of the decade. But by the time he became fully aware of the change and how extensive it was, he was seriously out-of-step with his audience. He had been steadfast in beating the drum of that old-time patriotism while substantial portions of the populace suffered through a severe crisis of conscience. Suddenly, expressing the same sentiments that had earned *Terry* a place in the *Congressional Record* branded Caniff a war monger. The verities that had underpinned his work for decades and made him rich and famous were no longer valid.

Should we look for cosmic significance in the apparent collapse of the value system that had for so long supported Caniff? Or was it symbolic of merely global matters? With the rise of Germany and Japan as international economic powers, American potency seemed to be ebbing away. (Germany and Japan may have lost the World War, but they were winning the peace.) As we entered the last quarter of the century, then, it was almost as if the rancorous Vietnam failure confirmed U.S. impotence and with that, signaled the end of the American century and the exhaustion and devaluation of everything the American dream stood for. And Caniff, as a champion of those beliefs, got caught in the riptide. He had been caught virtually unaware.

Nothing in the reception of *Steve Canyon* through the early years of the Vietnam engagement had been alarming enough to cast a shadow over his work's continuing widespread popularity. So Caniff had no cause to examine the potency of the propositions that informed the strip. In May 1966, the *Houston Post* ran a readership survey, and *Canyon* came in 17th out of 35 strips. But there was nothing alarming in that: only 5 of the 16 strips running ahead of it were story strips. All the others were gag strips, and Caniff was well aware of the declining popularity of continuity strips. As far as he could tell, nothing had changed. Indeed, he could take comfort from the survey because it showed his strip running ahead of Hal Foster's *Prince Valiant* and Roy Crane's *Buz Sawyer.* And his work continued to enjoy enormous regard in the trade. *Steve Canyon* still headlined the Syndicate publicity; it was always the first strip named in lists of features. And that fall, there was a one-man show of his work in Paris. For all intents and purposes, he was still on the top of the heap. So he was all the more astonished when he realized that large numbers of his fellow citizens were marching to a different drummer, chanting the tune of a new irreverent kind of patriotism.

Caniff had always kept his finger on the pulse of popular culture, but he had failed to register all the implications of the larger shiftings of attitude and mood in the years following WWII. After the sacrifices and shortages of the war years, the country had turned to self-gratification, and during the relative calm of the Eisenhower era, it had rejoiced in collecting the material goods that the peacetime economy cranked out in such abundance. There was little in such pursuits to fan the flame of patriotism. And because the

STEVE IS SPEAKING OF PATRIOTISM
12/15 "ENERGETIC YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THE WELLSPRING OF SINCERE, UNQUESTIONING PATRIOTIC FERVOR...THE HITLER YOUTH ORGANIZATION WAS JUST THAT...
...TO A COLLEGE GROUP
...SO WAS THE CHINESE RED GUARD.
MILTON CANIFF
"AND OF COURSE, THE SOVIET RED YOUTH LEGIONS ARE ACTIVE IN THIS AREA."
EVEN THE U.S. BOY- AND GIRL- SCOUT MOVEMENTS SEEM TO ECHO SIMILAR ATTITUDES. BUT THERE IS ONE BIG DIFFERENCE... AMERICAN KIDS CAN QUIT ANY TIME THEY CHOOSE!!
ANYONE WHO BUCKS THE TIDE KNOWS THE CONSEQUENCES, YET, UNDER THE AMERICAN SYSTEM IS CONSTITUTIONALLY ENTITLED TO ACT FOR HIMSELF.
WON'T GO!
12/28
STEVE IS SPEAKING TO A COLLEGE GROUP
WHETHER SUCH ACTION IS TO THEN BE FORGIVEN SHOULD PERHAPS BE FOR HIS PEERS TO DECIDE...MEN HIS OWN AGE WHO DID (AND THOSE WHO DID NOT) SERVE IN UNIFORM DURING AN 'UNPOPULAR' WAR!
"THE WORDS 'BIRTH' AND 'PAIN' ARE INSEPARABLE—WHETHER APPLIED TO CREATURES OR IDEAS... 'LIBERTY,' AS WE CALL IT, RESULTED FROM YOUNG MEN GOING TO JAIL FOR REFUSING TO SERVE THEIR COUNTRY - AND PAY TAXES TO IT!
OR His Majesty's NAVY Department of Personnel
"ROBERT E. LEE WAS A NONCITIZEN UNTIL 1975 BECAUSE HE 'DESERTED' FROM THE UNITED STATES ARMY."
FROM THE FORGE OF ANGUISH AND DESPAIR HAS COME THE WORLD'S DEEP STRENGTHS, BUT APATHY AND AMIABILITY PRODUCE CUCKOO CLOCKS!
MILTON CANIFF
12/29 "EVERYONE LIKES TO BELONG TO A GROUP—TO LOVE, AND BE LOVED BY HIS PEERS..."
THE HEART OF THE MATTER, IN MY VIEW, IS TO HAVE THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE WHAT YOU WISH TO SALUTE!
BETTER THUNDEROUS SILENCE THAN A SMATTERING OF APPLAUSE—
WELL—FIRE AND FALL BACK!
BUT WHAT STEVE DOES NOT SEE—ARE THE BAGS OF OVERRIPE VEGETABLES—WHICH WERE NOT USED!
MILTON CANIFF

Korean police action had yet to be resolved in favor of one side or the other, Americans could take little national pride in that enterprise. And the questionable purpose of the Vietnam adventure did nothing either to revive the patriotic zeal of earlier times. Neither of these wars fired enough positive national feeling to take the minds of its citizens off their self-indulgent postwar binge.

But perhaps only hindsight can yield this kind of thumbnail analysis. In any event, the matter is surely moot here. Even if Caniff had been aware of what subtle tranformations were taking place in the land, he could scarcely be imagined capable of responding to them: it would have required him to abandon habits of thought and beliefs that were a part of his very being.

He believed he was doing what Kipling had done. Indeed, so he was. And he believed that what Kipling had done was worth doing. But he also believed that the Vietnam war was a war that should be fought. "I was a hawk," he told me.

At first the criticism that he was a propagandist had not bothered him. "Of course we were propagandists," he said, "thinking of George Wunder and Roy Crane. "We all were. Same reason you go and cheer your football team. You don't question anything about it. You went to school there, that's your team, and so you root for 'em. You're expected to."

But quite apart from his convictions about the war and what a citizen's role should be when his country's soldiers are fighting in the field, there was the storyteller's instinct for his story and his characters and for their truth.

"My attitude has always been that if you have a military man in a military situation," he said, "you can't have him be the Ambassador to Sweden. You have to get him into the fight. And an Air Force guy would be there no matter what....

I lost papers because of it; there's no doubt about it. There was no pussyfooting involved in cancellations. Yet it would have been ridiculous for Canyon to be at a benefit somewhere in uniform. He had to be out there. It would not have been true to the strip to have him anywhere else. Whatever else you have, you have to stick with the integrity of the piece. Integrity is the key to everything."

As the tumultuous sixties came to a close, opposition to the war had become so acrimonious and antimilitary feeling so widespread that Caniff could no longer tell stories about a military man doing a military job. A military man was simply not the average reader's idea of a hero any more.

He realized that Vietnam could not inspire the idealism of WWII: "There's no Hitler today," he told journalist Jay Maeder. "There's no Hirohito. There's none of that. Just a big fat nothing to get killed for, just because you got in the wrong place."

As always a student of his society, Caniff had come by 1971 to realize the sincerity of those who opposed the war and the depth of their feeling. And he posted his realization in the strip. While in a Scandinavian country on a mission for the Air Force Intelligence in May, Steve and Summer (now his wife) encounter a number of Americans who have deserted the U.S. Army while in Europe. When Summer asks him if he's bitter about the deserters, Steve says:

"Summer, I'm not bitter about *anything*. When an individual knows the cost of a personal action, then does it—that's his business. George Washington and Robert E. Lee were considered deserters and traitors in their day. These men who are AWOL because they object to Vietnam may be heroes at some future time."

By this time, Steve was almost never seen in uniform any more. He was still in the Air Force, but he now worked on special assignments almost exclusively. The Air Force had created its Office of Special Investigations, and Caniff assigned his hero to that office. The AFOSI had nearly 2,000 special agents and administrative people by the mid-1970s and dealt with fraud, counterintelligence, and any kind of criminal activity. It was a perfect assignment for Steve: it gave him the mobility to do just about anything, and that gave Caniff great flexibility in creating new adventures for him. It also justified Steve's appearing in civilian clothes most of the time.

"I kept thinking of James Bond," Caniff explained. Bond was a lieutenant commander in the British Navy, but he was always in mufti when on assignment for the Secret Service. Caniff treated Steve the same way.

At about the same time, in a concession to Steve's presumed advancing age, Caniff took him out of the cockpit. "Flying fighters is a young man's occupation," he said. "It's a tough job keeping current in the airplane you fly. I have Canyon fly light aircraft from time to time, but nobody Canyon's age flies military jets regularly any more, so I don't have him do it in the strip."

Steve's age probably wasn't the only reason Caniff eased him out of his flight gear. With Steve no longer flying military aircraft, it was easier to keep him out of the battle zone in Vietnam. Caniff sent Steve to Southeast Asia occasionally in the seventies. His dedication to maintaining the illusion of reality in the strip made it impossible for him to ignore that part of the world completely: as long as hostilities continued there and as long as Steve was associated with the Air Force, Vietnam had to be a presence in the strip. But Caniff kept that presence to a minimum. Steve didn't go there often, and when he did, he saw no battlefield action. Late in 1971, for instance, when it became widely known that American soldiers were using narcotics in Vietnam, Steve is sent to a nameless country in Southeast Asia to see if he can disrupt the drug traffic.

But if Caniff took his hero out of uniform and steered clear of the Vietnam war in his strip's continuities, on Christmas Day every year, the cartoonist still hammered away at his customary holiday theme.

"Because it's Christmas Day, an already negated day [on which the storyline couldn't be advanced], I took advantage of my license," Caniff said. "In effect, I am caught talking to myself over an open mike. Whatever the other strips [the rest of the year] say, they're meant to be as objective as anything. But on these holidays, you're supposed to have your back turned. You're not supposed to be listening, and the mike happens to be open, and that's me talking."

And it was the same unflinching Dutch uncle tough talk about remembering the men who were doing the fighting. No punches pulled. No concessions to antiwar or antimilitary sentiment. The storyteller may have compromised for the sake of the entertainer's survival. But the patriot could not be stilled every day of the year.

He realized that Vietnam could not inspire the idealism of WWII: "There's no Hitler today. There's no Hirohito. There's none of that. Just a big fat nothing to get killed for, just because you got in the wrong place."

All during the Vietnam era, Caniff's holiday essay was constant in its support of the soldier in the field. Even as misguided segments of a disillusioned citizenry were spitting on returning G.I.s because they wore military uniforms, the cartoonist persisted in remembering their sacrifices. Although the embattled military establishment must have been grateful for these public expressions of appreciation, Caniff did not make them for the institutions of the Defense Department: he made them for the benefit of the individual soldiers.

The Christmas strip was the only essay strip Caniff did consistently through the Vietnam period. Coincidentally, he had stopped doing the Armed Forces Day strips just as the Vietnam war began to escalate. But the war had nothing to do with ending the series. In discussing the matter with Chris Jenson, Caniff maintained that his decision had been

formed quite independent of any outside pressures of that sort. "Nobody said anything," he said; "I just stopped." Over the years, he explained, he had begun to receive more and more requests from all sorts of deserving groups to do special strips for their causes. "I was overloading, overplaying my hand," he explained. "If you used one, you had to use them all, so I had to just cut it off. I was beginning to feel like a propagandist." He continued the Air Force Day strips but only periodically in special anniversary years.

Despite the adjustments Caniff made in his stories and in the presentation of his hero, *Steve Canyon* continued to lose papers. In retrospect, I suspect that neither the strip's military setting nor Caniff's hawkish attitude towards the Vietnam war early on was the conclusive factor in the mind of every editor who discontinued the strip. Many editors may have cancelled because they feared what they imagined their readers were thinking about a paper that would run a military comic strip. But doubtless just as many stopped running *Steve Canyon* because they wanted to try one of the popular new gag strips, and they had to drop something to make room for it. Newspaper editors had been stumping against the continuity strip—particularly the adventure genre—for years. And when the military associations in *Steve Canyon* collided with the unpopular war, the coincidence gave restive editors a convenient excuse for dropping the strip. The Vietnam war supplied the excuse rather than the cause, but by then, an excuse was all many editors needed. But whether cause or excuse, the irony remained: the same part of the world in which Caniff had found his greatest fame doing *Terry and the Pirates* nearly destroyed his livelihood when he took *Steve Canyon* there a quarter of a century later.

He realized that Vietnam could not inspire the idealism of WWII: "There's no Hitler today. There's no Hirohito. There's none of that. Just a big fat nothing to get killed for, just because you got in the wrong place."

The kind of patriotism that so informed Caniff's work would emerge again in the land a decade or so later, and Caniff would live to see it and celebrate it. But by then, the list of newspapers subscribing to *Steve Canyon* would be so short that the celebration would attract almost no national attention.

None of the developments attending the Vietnam debacle were lost on Caniff. We talked on several occasions about the Vietnam era and its impact on the strip's circulation. Caniff was under no illusions about what had happened.

"The Flag-waving label caused a lot of problems for me," he said. "I lost a lot of papers. All of the Canadian papers.

And I never got them back." He was working on a Sunday page; for a few moments, his pen scratching across the paper made the only noise in the room. "We took a real beating," he continued. "After that was when the narrative strips in general started to lose out. It had begun almost the day after the surrender on the *Missouri*. Tastes, generally, in comic strips changed just about the time the War ended. Alex Raymond and I didn't realize that at the end of the World War II the whole world would be re-created. And we're still continuing with those changes. But it didn't happen overnight. It took a while for it to take place. But the *Terry and the Pirates* way of thinking ended with World War II. The whole approach to cartooning began to change just at that time, and the world that *Terry* represented was no longer going to be. After the War, the cycle of the popular gag strip of today began to assert itself. Suddenly these boys were moving in on us the way we had moved in on our predecessors.

"It took a long time for it to happen," he said again, his pen still scratching away. "It's like Alzheimer's disease: it's very, very gradual. And yet at some point, we all became aware of the fact that the snowball had wound up and was rolling down the hill. No stopping it then—because [with the gag strips] you didn't have to remember anything." The traditional rationale for the continuity strip was no longer enough to assure those strips a place in the newspaper.

"And then the newspapers started folding," Caniff went on, "which made it worse for us because there was no place to go down the street. Only a dozen or so cities now have two newspapers," he reflected sadly.

"And then editors played into the circumstance by reducing the space given to comic strips," I said. "The thing that you go to a comic strip for—among other things—is to see pictures. And you can't see the pictures any more."

"And you can't read the words," Caniff said pointedly. "They're so small." He put down the pen and took up a brush. "We've been victims of our own folly, I guess. We built ourselves up as the only place you can get this kind of stuff [visual narrative], then along came television—not movies, but television—adventure stories narrated visually in the home—"

And the old argument collapsed, I finished the thought to myself.

* * * * *

The seventies and the eighties were not hospitable for adventure strips. Newspaper editors didn't believe readers would follow continuity stories any more: they preferred, it was alleged, to have their adventure all at once, in 30- and 60-minute doses in front of their television instead of getting it in daily installments in their newspapers. And the size of comic strips was steadily shrinking, leaving no room for the great mood-establishing artwork of the thirties.

The task that Milton Caniff confronted every day for the last fifteen years of *Steve Canyon*'s run was daunting in the extreme. In the wizened carcass that remained of the story strip's once spacious format, there was scarcely enough room to draw discernible pictures, let alone interesting ones. With less than half the space he'd once had to work in, he had to write installments that carried his story forward to a satisfactory conclusion every day using only three panels to pace developments instead of four or five. And he had to use fewer words in an entire strip that he'd once lavished on a single speech in one panel. Somehow, he had to appeal to readers who, as life-long television watchers, were more sophisticated visually than ever before and who seemed to prefer a quick laugh every day on the comics page rather than the thrill of vicarious danger. And whatever else he did, he had to avoid offending (if he couldn't actually appeal to) an audience large segments of which were hostile to everything his work had represented throughout a long and highly visible career. Moreover, as Arn Saba put it, "[With] all these restrictions and diminishments, Caniff is still faced with the requirement of telling a coherent story that is continued from day to day, in which he not only wants to build suspense and invent clever plot twists, but also, if possible, portray character and maybe even draw a few decent pictures once in a while."

The miracle was that Caniff did it. Did it all. And he did more than merely survive. He developed new storytelling devices and drawing tricks. He never stopped looking for and introducing novelties in his strip. Every story idea was a brand new opportunity; every daily installment, a challenge. He never tired of it. He never gave up, never quit. To the very end, he was an imposing figure in the comic strip field—a creative intelligence and an ever-working imagination, an inspiration and mentor to an entire profession.

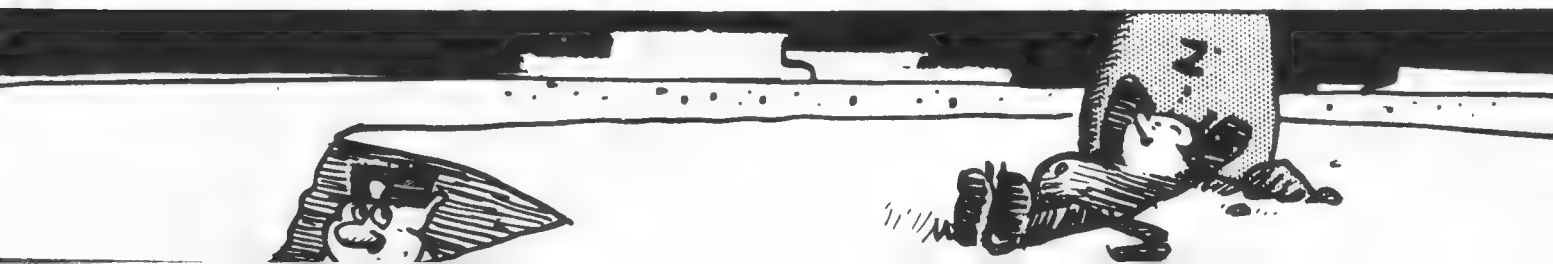
"Krazy Kat"

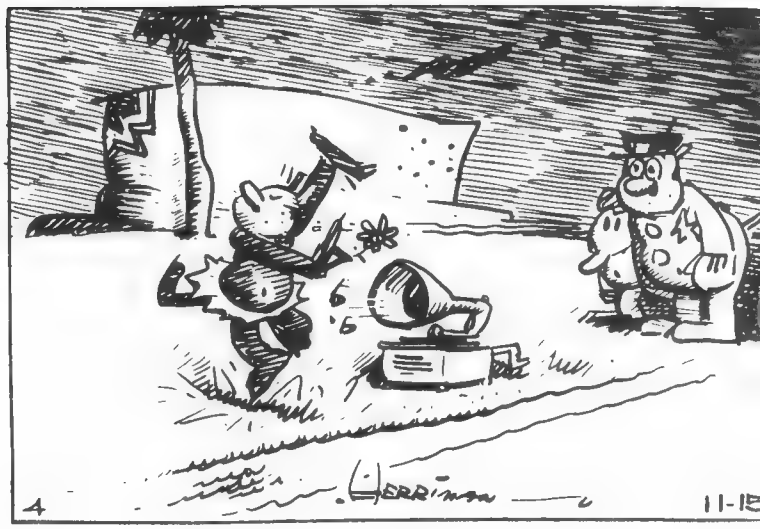
a love story

by Edward Sorel

In 1938, at the age of nine, I discovered one of life's cruelest ironies: the best comic strips invariably appear in the worst newspapers. Since Hearst's *Evening Journal-American* was, according to my mother, the worst "fascist rag" in New York, it was inevitable that Popeye, Maggie and Jiggs, and Krazy Kat would be locked up in its pages. With the *Journal* banned at home, my glimpses of Krazy were destined to be fleeting. I carried on as best I could through childhood and early adolescence, seeing her now and then for a minute or two, until she disappeared completely in 1944. (I say "her," but Krazy was a cat of seemingly ambiguous gender.)

I thought I had forgotten her, had put her entirely out of my mind, when, in 1969, I saw her again—exactly as I remembered her—in a large anthology of *Krazy Kat* strips published by Grosset & Dunlap. Krazy, Ignatz Mouse, Offissa Pupp, and the other residents of Coconino County still seemed as enigmatic as ever, but it didn't matter now because I had E.E. Cummings to explain everything. His essay on Krazy served as the introduction to the book and it was quite an eye-opener. Apparently *Krazy Kat* had more symbolism in it than all the novels of Kafka and Mann.

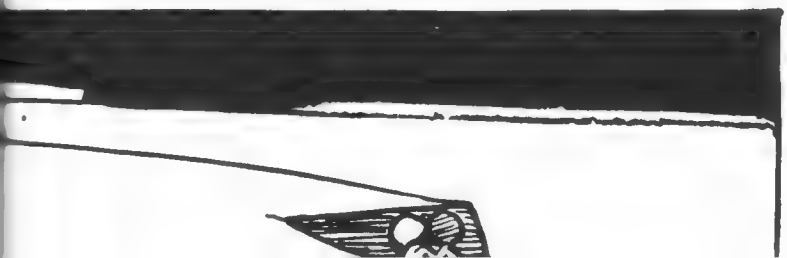


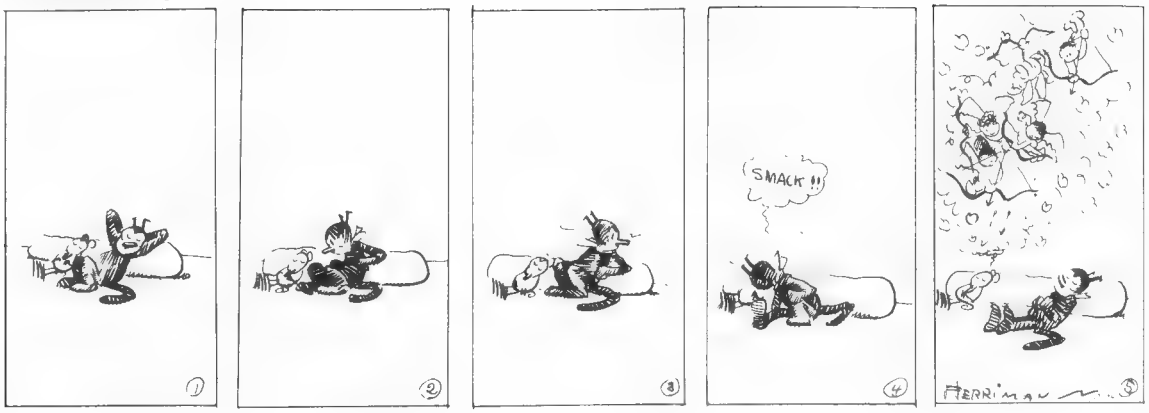


But before I share with you the allegory that Cummings insists lies beneath Herriman's engaged surface, allow me to outline the plot of *Krazy Kat* for the uninitiated. Krazy loves Ignatz, a cynical, brick-throwing mouse. Ignatz hates Krazy. Offissa Pupp, the well-meaning canine cop, loves Krazy and tries to protect her from getting beaned by Ignatz. Krazy, however, loves having her head creased with a brick thrown by Ignatz, because to Krazy it's a sign of his love for her. So much for the plot. Here's the allegory: Ignatz Mouse and Offissa Pupp are society's age-old antagonists—the rebel and the policeman. Ignatz is an anarchist. Pupp is our guardian of law and order. Neither can understand Krazy, because Krazy is a creature of infinite love, while they can only understand power. For them might makes right. For Krazy *love conquers all.* Proffissa Cummings will now explain:

"Ignatz Mouse and Offissa Pupp (each completely convinced that his own particular brand of might makes right) are simpleminded. Krazy isn't—therefore, to Offissa Pupp and Ignatz Mouse, Krazy is. But if both our hero and our villain don't and can't understand our heroine, each of them can and does misunderstand her differently. To our softheaded altruist, she is the adorably helpless incarnation of saintliness. To our hardhearted egotist, she is the puzzling indestructible embodiment of idiocy. The benevolent overdog sees her as an inspired weakling. The malevolent undermouse views her as a born target. Meanwhile Krazy Kat, through this double misunderstanding, fulfills her joyous destiny."

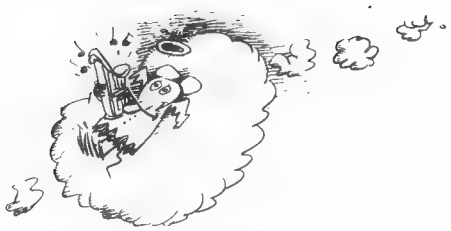
Cummings's analysis, written in 1946, was not the first to interpret Krazy. In 1924 Gilbert Seldes came to similar conclusions about the Herriman strip in his book *The Seven Lively Arts.* Others who have felt compelled to extol Krazy's virtues include such diverse luminaries as Deems Taylor, John Canaday, Damon Runyon, and Charles Schulz. Woodrow Wilson insisted on seeing every episode, and Adolph Bolm created a serious, if ill-fated, ballet with Krazy as the central figure. Yet, though Krazy was always the darling of certain intellectuals, the strip was never phenomenally popular.



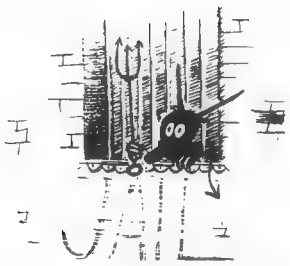


HERRIMAN

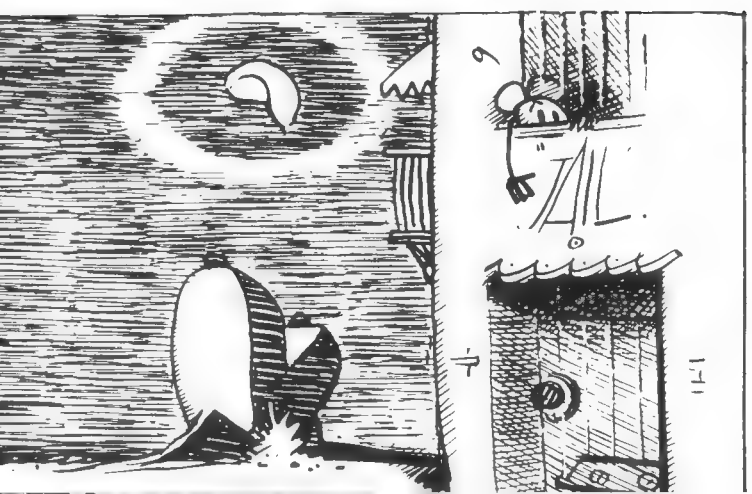
In the 1930s, when such favorites as *Blondie* and *Bringing Up Father* were appearing in roughly a thousand papers, *Krazy Kat* was being syndicated to thirty-five. Herriman, fully aware that King Features was not getting sufficient revenue from the strip to justify his $750-a-week salary, volunteered to take a salary cut. But William Randolph Hearst, who owned the syndicate, was himself a member of the Kult and wouldn't hear of it. The word came down from San Simeon: Herriman was to continue drawing *Krazy Kat* as long as he chose to do so.

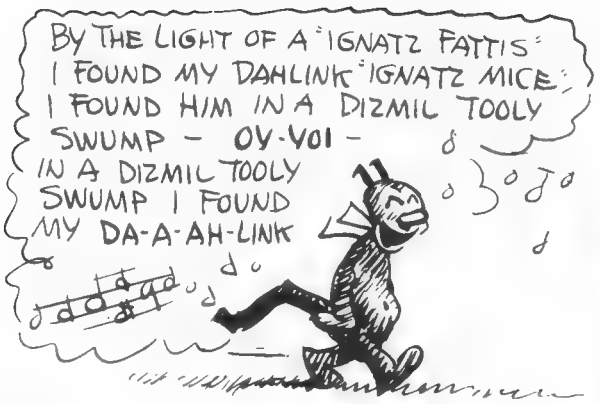


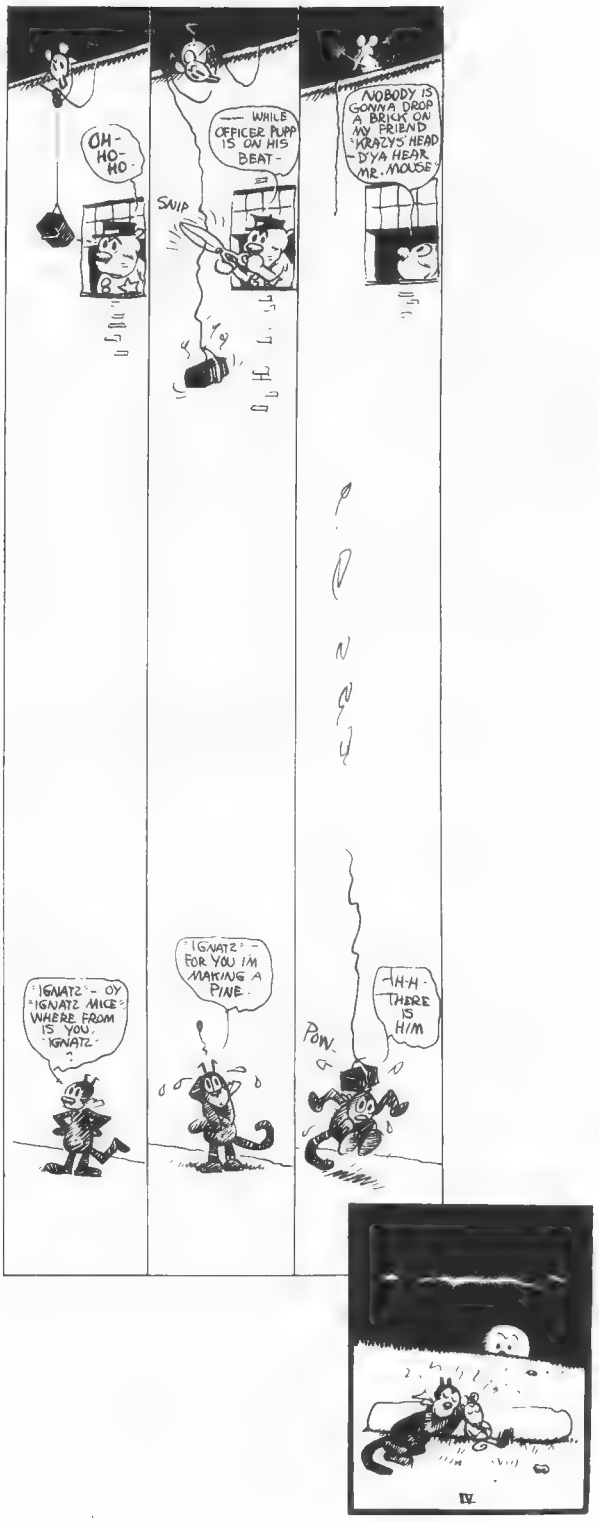
Though Hearst himself championed the cartoonist, his newspapers inadvertently ruined any chance *Krazy Kat* may have had for a wide audience. The scare headlines and the red-baiting, labor-baiting editorial slant that characterized all Hearst papers repelled the very people who were most likely to respond to Herriman's brand of wit. The lowbrow readers Hearst did attract preferred the obvious humor of *Bringing Up Father.* If Herriman saw the irony in his predicament or if he envied the greater success enjoyed by lesser cartoonists, we have no way of knowing. Biographical material on Herriman is sparse and none of it offers much of an insight into the man who created America's most surreal comic strip.



Born in New Orleans in 1881 to Greek parents who moved to Los Angeles before the turn of the century, George was soon pressed into service in his father's bakery. Papa vehemently disapproved of his son's cartooning, and young Herriman broke free of the family business when he got a job as a house painter. That career came to an abrupt end when he fell off a scaffold. More determined than ever to be a cartoonist, he rode the rails to New York, taking only his drawings and his young wife. In New York he succeeded in getting a staff job on the *World* and later the *Journal.* There he created a series of comic strips (*Professor Otto and His Auto, Doc Archie and Bean, The Dingbat Family*), all of which were very much in the mode of the day. In fact, one must admit that his penwork at this time looked like a crude imitation of Bud Fisher, who drew *Mutt and Jeff.* But *The Dingbat Family* had a cat who was madly in love with a mouse, and this odd couple proved to be more amusing than the Dingbats themselves.




BY THE LIGHT OF A 'IGNATZ FATTIS'
I FOUND MY DAHLINK 'IGNATZ MICE'
I FOUND HIM IN A DIZMIL TOOLY
SWUMP - OY-VOI -
IN A DIZMIL TOOLY
SWUMP I FOUND
MY DA-A-AH-LINK

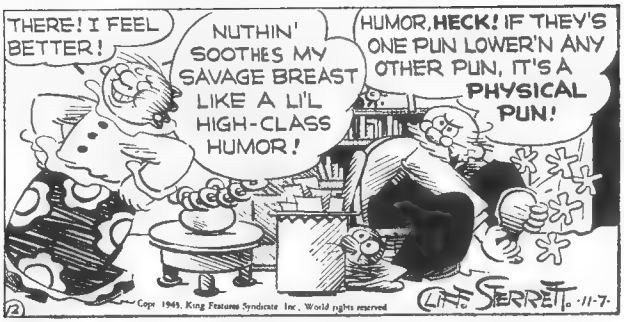

OH-HO-HO
— WHILE OFFICER PUPP IS ON HIS BEAT -
SNIP
NOBODY IS GONNA DROP A BRICK ON MY FRIEND 'KRAZY'S HEAD - D'YA HEAR MR. MOUSE
'IGNATZ' - OY 'IGNATZ MICE' WHERE FROM IS YOU 'IGNATZ'?
'IGNATZ' - FOR YOU I'M MAKING A PINE.
PON.
-H-H- THERE IS HIM
IV.

In 1913 Krazy Kat became the star of his own strip. Freed of the necessity of drawing people, Herriman's penwork quickly evolved into the liberated, spontaneous-looking style we now recognize as his alone. Little has been written about Herriman the artist. Seldes, Cummings, and the other literati who extolled Herriman's work were, quite naturally, enchanted by the literary idea behind *Krazy Kat*. But try to imagine for a moment the Krazy saga drawn by another cartoonist—say Chic Young or Walt Kelly. Suddenly the magic is gone. It is Herriman's pen, with its thick and thin line and its unmechanical, emotional crosshatching, that turns *Krazy Kat* into a cartoon counterpart of expressionism.

But it was in the large, full-page Sunday comic section, with its hand-separated color overlays, that Herriman's graphic genius can be best appreciated. For one thing, Herriman never seemed to repeat himself. Each Sunday page looked entirely different from the one before. The *Krazy Kat* logo not only changed its character from week to week but kept moving about the page, on occasion settling down right in the middle. Nor could one count on a set number of squares or even sequential narration. The only thing one could depend on was the aesthetic beauty of the page. These Sunday color pages represent the peak of twentieth-century comic art.

Herriman died on April 26, 1944. The Journal's page-one obituary described him as slight of build, a devoted husband and father, mild-mannered, and a generous (and anonymous) contributor to charities for the needy.

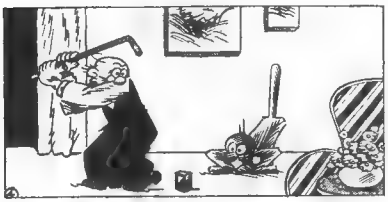
But, of course, I never believed anything I read in a Hearst paper.


THERE! I FEEL BETTER!
NUTHIN' SOOTHES MY SAVAGE BREAST LIKE A LI'L HIGH-CLASS HUMOR!
HUMOR, HECK! IF THEY'S ONE PUN LOWER'N ANY OTHER PUN, IT'S A PHYSICAL PUN!
CLIFF STERRETT. 11-7
Copr. 1945, King Features Syndicate Inc., World rights reserved

Cliff Sterrett's POLLY & H

Cliff Sterrett's *Polly and her Pals* is among the pantheon of American newspaper strips. Begun in 1912, ending in 1958, its 46 years of life is also a creative miracle. Serendipitously enough, we've decided to go full circle and present a portfolio of Cliff Sterrett's masterpiece in this last issue of *NEMO* as we did in the very first issue.

Our first issue printed a selection of Sunday pages from 1925; this time, we've chosen the best strips from a later period, 1943. Sterrett's imagery has calmed down considerably—gone are the warped perspectives and shifting, dreamlike landscapes—but the drawing was never lovelier. The gags, though they occasionally rise to the level of fine, dry wit, are usually no better than those of a hack vaudevillian; the reason to savor these strips is not



HER PALS

The Best From '43

for the end but for the means: the grace and effortlessness with which some delightfully idiotic incident unfolds; facial expressions that reflect the self-satisfaction of the mischief-maker, the acceptance or, conversely, the frustration at the irreconcilable stupidities of life or fate; the slightly pixilated dialogue that so perfectly complements the impossible body language; the impeccable timing and visual rhythms that end in a groaner.

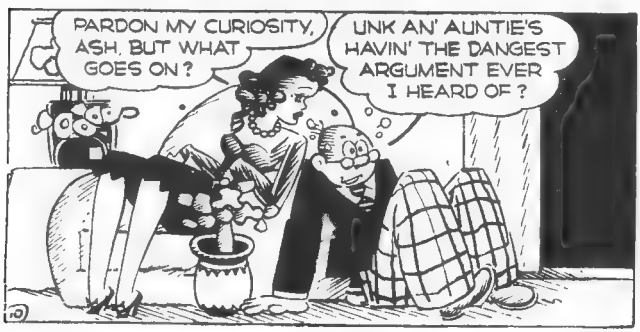
In the first issue of *NEMO* I wrote "Sterrett's work has remained somewhat obscure and under-appreciated for too many years" (always a master of understatement); considering the sales of the beautiful full-color Remco/Kitchen Sink edition of *Polly* strips, it still is. This is one more attempt to make it less so.

—Gary Groth

POLLY AND HER PALS

By CLIFF STERRETT.

Registered U. S. Patent Office

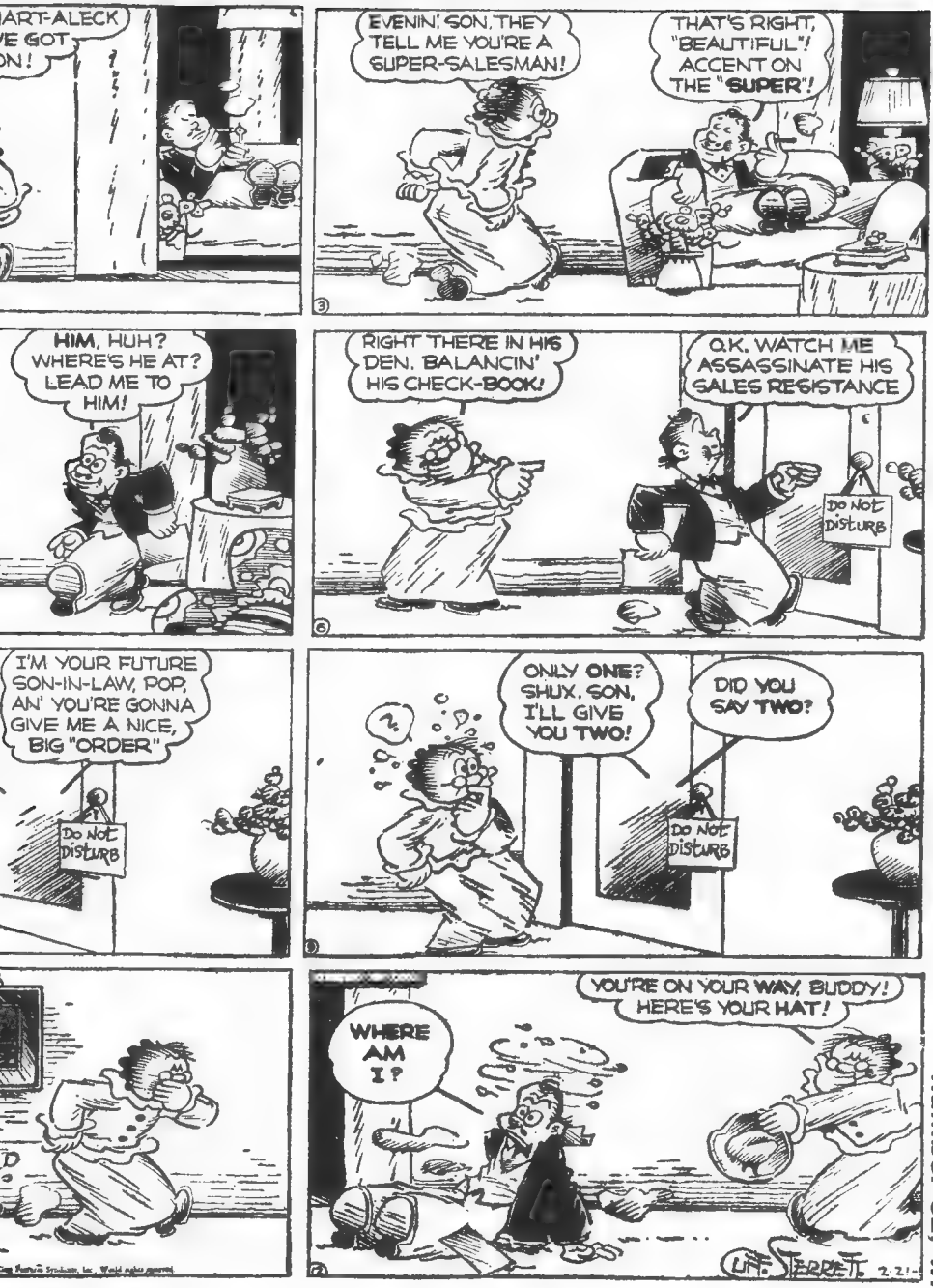


YES, YOU DO!
I DO NOT!
YOU DO SO!
DON'T BELIEVE YER UNCLE, ASH, HE'S ALL WET
THERE! THAT PROVES IT!
IT DOES NUTHIN' OF THE SORT!
T KING SOLOMON, OW, I'M JUST PLAIN SHUR URL PERKINS
ONLY HIM AN' KITTY KIN SOLVE YOUR PROBLEM AN' KITTY WON'T TALK!
NK CLAIMS KITTY WASHIN' HER FACE ITH HER PAWS
AN' AUNTIE CLAIMS SHE'S WASHIN' HER PAWS AN' WIPIN' 'EM ON HER FACE
CLIFF STERRETT

POLLY AND HER PALS
By CLIFF STERRETT.
Registered U. S. Patent Office
THAT'S A NIFTY IDEA, ALICE! SURE, I'LL HAVE A PARTNER. I'M EXPECTING GEORGE, ANY MINUTE!
RING DING G'LING
DON'T
YOUR T
OFF, GE
WE'RE
OU
YES, IT WON'T TAKE ME TWO MINUTES TO GET MY WRAPS!
?
LIS
P-S
LI
SLAM!
GEORGE BEAT IT, POLLY, THE POOR FELLER'S SHY!

TAKE
THINGS
EORGE,
GOING
T!
OUT?
YES, WE'RE ALL GOING DOWN TO DINNEY'S DINNER AND DANCE!
WE ARE?
TEN, ASH.
O—ST!
SORRY, GEORGE, NO CAN DO!!
B-ZZZ BZZZ B-Z
T, MR. PERKINS,
STEN——
?
B-ZZZZZ BZZZ BZZ
SORRY, SON, YOU AN' ME BOTH!
"SHY"? WHAT'S HE SHY ABOUT?
ABOUT TWO BUCKS!
LIFE STERRETT
12-14

POLLY AND HER PALS
By CLIFF STERRETT.
Registered U. S. Patent Office
THEN YOU AIN'T "IN" TO THIS HERE HALF-PINT, HUH?
HEAVENS, NO! I'VE REFUSED THE CONCEITED, LITTLE PEST TEN TIMES
LEAVE THE LIL SM
TO ME, POLLY, I'V
AN INSPIRATIO
1
2
"SUPER," HUH? I'M FROM MISSOURI, YOUNG MAN!
OH, YEAH? I'LL BETCHA I CAN GET AN ORDER OUTTA YOU IN TEN SECONDS FLAT!
YOU'RE BARKIN' UP THE WRONG TREE, BUB! PAW IS THE PURCHASIN' AGENT FOR THIS OUTFIT!
4
5
HI-YUH, PAL? KEEP YOUR SEAT! DON'T GET UP! THIS WON'T TAKE ME BUT TWO SHAKES
?
WHO TH' HECK ARE YOU?
7
8
YEAH! "GIT OUT"! AN' "STAY OUT"!
WOT TH'—?
10
11


ART-ALECK
VE GOT
ON!
EVENIN', SON. THEY TELL ME YOU'RE A SUPER-SALESMAN!
THAT'S RIGHT, "BEAUTIFUL"! ACCENT ON THE "SUPER"!
3
HIM, HUH? WHERE'S HE AT? LEAD ME TO HIM!
RIGHT THERE IN HIS DEN, BALANCIN' HIS CHECK-BOOK!
O.K. WATCH ME ASSASSINATE HIS SALES RESISTANCE
DO NOT DISTURB
6
I'M YOUR FUTURE SON-IN-LAW, POP, AN' YOU'RE GONNA GIVE ME A NICE, BIG "ORDER"
DO NOT DISTURB
ONLY ONE? SHUX, SON, I'LL GIVE YOU TWO!
DID YOU SAY TWO?
DO NOT DISTURB
9
WHERE AM I?
YOU'RE ON YOUR WAY, BUDDY! HERE'S YOUR HAT!
12
LYN STERRETT 2.21

POLLY AND HER PALS

By CLIFF STERRETT.

Registered U. S. Patent Office

IT'S A CINCH I LOST IT BETWEEN THE SETTIN'-ROOM AN' THE STOOP!
GOOD HEAVENS! MY POCKET-BOOK'S OPEN AN' I'M TEN DOLLARS SHY!
HMPH! FORGIVE ME, PAW! I DONE YOU WRONG!
?
AY FROM THAT HOSS' WIZE GUY! MOVE OVER!
?
WAL, I'LL BE—IT'S STUCK TO MY SOLE WITH CHEWIN'-GUM!
BELIEVE ME, ANGEL, HERE'S WHERE YOU GIT THE LICKIN' OF YER YOUNG LIFE!
BAW!
YOU LITTLE DEMON! YOU'VE DONE IT AGAIN!
SMACK!
BAW!
I AIN'T NO MORE, MAW! I'VE QUIT FER LIFE!
CLIFF STERRETT 7-28
PLOP!
YOU? I NEVER KNEW YOU WAS A GUM-ADDICT
?
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POLLY AND HER PALS

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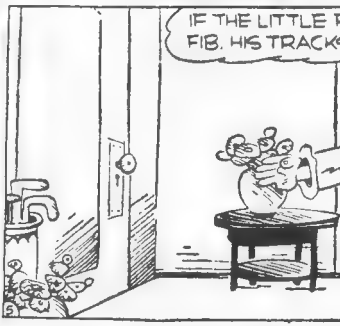

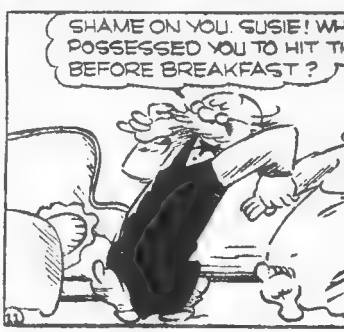

PAW!
GIT
UB
I PROMISED I'D BE HOME BY TWELVE, DIDN'T I?
I'VE HEARD YOUR PROMISES BEFORE, BRIGHT EYES!
HEY, POLLY! WHAT TIME DID IT START SNOWIN' LAST NIGHT?
FAKER'S TOLD ME A
S WILL TELL THE TALE
QUICK, ASH P-ST! HELP ME OFF WITH THESE CONFOUNDED CONTRAPTIONS
WOT TH'-HECK ARE THEY?
SHALL I HIDE 'EM UP-ATTIC, UNK?
AT EVER
HE JUG
WHY— YOU— HOW DARE YOU?
YES, DOC. V'BETTER COME GIVE HER A HYPODERMIC. NO. SHE DIDIN'T SAY IT WAS PINK- SHE JUST SAID IT WAS A ELEPHANT!
GIT ME A AX! I WANT MY LAWYER!
CLIFF STERRETT 37

POLLY AND HER PALS

By CLIFF STERRETT.

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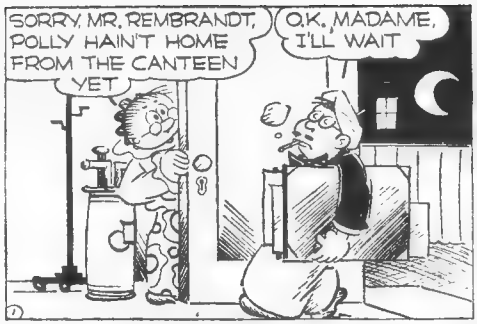

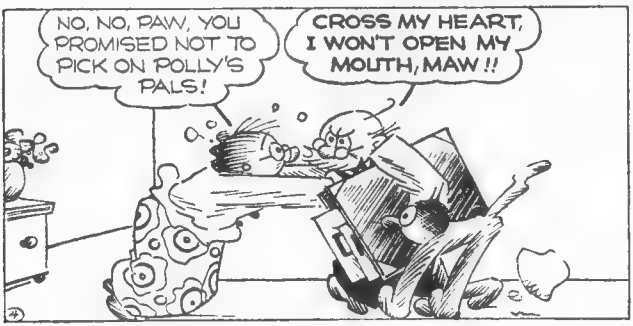

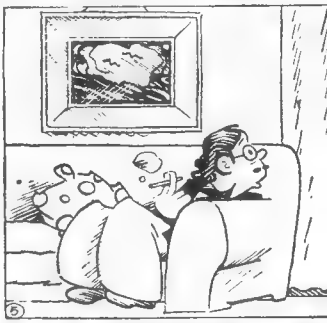

TTES ON
BRANDT!
WHADD'YE MEAN, HE'S A FAKE? AIN'T HE A ARTIST?
HECK, NO! HE'S A SIGN-PAINTER!
FOR SALE
FOR RENT
NO PARKING
THIS WAY OUT
KEEP MOVING
NO U TURNS
ZIP YOUR LIP!
DANGER
NO ADMISSION
PRIVATE
KEEP OUT
3-21
CLIFF STERRETT

POLLY
AND
HER PALS
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DRAT! DERN! HECK!
1
2
THERE YOU ARE, YOU LIL' RASCAL!
4
FUDGE PHOOEY FIDDLESTICKS
5
AH!
7
LISTEN, MAGGIE, WHAT TH' HECK ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO BE DOIN'?
8
WHEN I GET WHERE I KIN REACH IT, I CAN'T SEE IT!
10
AN' WH
WHER
SEE IT
REA
11
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OH!
3
8
PICKIN' UP A NEEDLE I DROPPED!
WAL, WHY ALL THIS MYSTERIOUS RING-AROUND THE ROSIE NONSENSE?
MYSTERIOUS, MY EYE! NONSENSE, NUTHIN'!
9
HEN I GET RE I KIN T, I CAN'T ACH IT!
IT JUST GOES TO PROVE WHAT I'VE ALLUS CLAIMED, KITTY, "WOMEN AIN'T PEOPLE"!
DRAT! DERN! SHUX!
SNIFF
SALTS
12
LINE STERRETT 3-28

POLLY AND HER PALS
By CLIFF STERRETT.
TILL TOMORROW, MORTIMER
O.K., POLLY, RIGHT!
MY STARS! Y'SPOSE S
SERIOUS ABOUT TH
SILLY-LOOKIN' SAP?
RIDICULE IS THE SOLUTION, SEE? WE'LL LAUGH THE FELLER OFF'N THE MAP!
SORRY, SAM'L, HE AIN'T FUNNY TO ME, HE'S JUST A PAIN IN THE NECK!
TAKE THAT LOST EYE-BROW ON HIS UPPER-LIP, FER EXAMPLE, AIN'T THAT A SCREAM?
HE, HE, HE, HA, HA, HAH! HO, HO, HO!
WHAT GOES ON, PA?
HEH, HEH, NUTHIN' NEVER GIVE ME SECH A KICK AS MORTIMER'S MUSTACHE!
WAL, MR. KING-SOLOMON-SAMBO-PERKINS, DIDJA PUT IT OVER?

HE'S
AT
IF SHE IS, I'LL SOON PUT A STOP TO IT!
WAIT! Y'MUSTN'T STRONG-ARM ROMANCE, MAW! LOVE THRIVES ON OPPOSITION!
YOU AIN'T SUGGESTIN' THAT I GLORIFY THE GOOF, IS YOU?

N
NOT TO ME IT AIN'T. IT'S A CAUTION TO CATS!
LEAVE IT TO ME, MAW, I'LL SOON SETTLE HIS HASH!

DITTO, DEARIE!
IT TICKLES ME, TOO

ER-UH, A'HEM, Y'MIGHT SAY AS HOW I DID AN' I DIDN'T!
WOT KINDA DOUBLE-TALK IS THAT? DIDJA OR DIDN'TCHA?
I AIN'T SARTIN'-SURE, SUSIE, Y'SEE IT SORTA BACK-FIRED ON ME!
WINSOR MCCAY
5-2-

POLLY AND HER PALS
By CLIFF STERRETT.
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WHAT'S TONIGHT'S TREAT, HARRY?
I THOUGHT I'D SING MY "SOUTHERN SUITE" SWEET!
HIST HIST HIST
GET YOUR EAR-MU
PAW_"FOG-HORN
IS HERE!
I ALLUS THOUGHT YOU SANG THE WUST BASS ON EARTH, BUT THIS WHIP-POOR-WILL IS WUSS!!
NO FOOLIN'!
WAY DOWN-
WA-AY DOWN-
HOW HE HA
IN PUBLIC
BRAVO! BRAVO! BRAVO!
CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP
AM
STUPI
INCR
?
BE YOU INSANE, SAM'L? ARE YOU OUT OF YER MIND?
CLAP CLAP CLAP
?
WOT'S YER IDE
IN APPLAUDIN'
SECH A PITIFU
PERFORMANCE

UFF'S ON, HARRY"
WHO'S **HE**? I NEVER **HEARD** OF **HIM**!
THAT'S BECAUSE YOU'VE BEEN OUT TO YOUR CLUB EVERY TIME HE'S CALLED!
Y'SAY THE FELLER SINGS A BAD BASSO-PROFUNDO, HUH?
AS THE **NERVE** TO SING S A MYSTERY TO ME
S-H'H'H'-- P—ST, LISTEN!
'WAY-DOWW-NN YONDER IN'NN —DEEEE--- CORN—FI-EE-LD!
AZIN'! ENDOUS! EDIBLE!
CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP
YOU'VE MADE A HIT, HARRY. GO TAKE A BOW!
RIGHT. OH, BOY! WILL THIS TICKLE MY TEACHER!
MARVELOUS! COLOSSAL! STUPENDOUS!
CLAP CLAP CLAP
A
SHUX, SUSIE, I WASN'T APPLAUDIN' HIS **VOICE**!
I WAS APPLAUDIN' HIS **NERVE**!
Carl Anderson
12
5-9-

POLLY AND HER PALS

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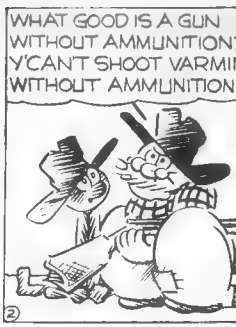

YAS, YAS, I KNOW! YOU TOLD ME ALL ABOUT IT LAST NIGHT!
I REMEMBER HIDIN' THEM CARTRIDGES LAST FALL, BUT I CAN'T REMEMBER WHERE TH' HECK I HID 'EM!
AW, FER GOSH SAKES!
3
HE'S BEEN BENDIN' MY EAR FER OVER A HOUR!
LISTEN, PAW, WHERE'S THIS HERE WOODCHUCK AT?
HE HOLES-UP UNDER THAT OLD STUMP DOWN IN THE BACK PASTURE!
6
SH'H'! P-ST! THAT THERE'S THE STUMP, AIN'T IT?
YEAH, THIS HERE'S IT! AN' THE CONFOUNDED CRITTER'S T'HOME!
GOOD! GIT DOWN ON YOUR STUMMICK!
9
YOU DON'T NEED NONE, DEARIE!
JUST LIE THERE AN' TALK HIM TO DEATH!
12
CLIFF STERRETT 5·16·

POLLY
AND
HER PALS
By CLIFF STERRETT.
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AIN'T THAT CUNNIN', KITTY?
NEVER KNEW IT TO FAIL, BY CRACKIE!
COME SPRING
LIGHTLY T
SW
LISTEN, DARLING - YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND
I UNDERSTAND THAT, IF YOU DON'T GIT THEM GROCERIES, WE WON'T EAT, SO GIT GOIN'!
I SHOULDA LISTENED
ALLUS SAID I WAS
CHUMP T'MARR
WORLD'S W
DILLY-DALL
LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP!

AIN'T THAT CUTE?

WAL, FER GOSH SAKES!

A FELLER'S FANCY
URNS TO HIS
EET PATOOTIE!

LEAN OUT THE WINDER A MINUTE, MAW— I WANNA WHISPER SOMETHIN' IN YOUR PRETTY LIL' PINK EAR!

GOOD GRIEF! AIN'T YOU GONE TO THE VILLAGE YET? I TOLDJA THE STORES CLOSED AT NOON!

TO MAMA! SHE
A
Y THE
UST
IER

WATCH YOUR STEP!

YOU'LL BE SORRY!

I SHOULD'A **LISTENED** TO **PAPA**! HE ALLUS USED T'SAY, "IT'S EASY TO TIE WITH YOUR **TONGUE** WHAT YOU CAN'T UNTIE WITH YOUR **TEETH**"!

CLIFF STERRETT

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5-30

POLLY AND HER PALS

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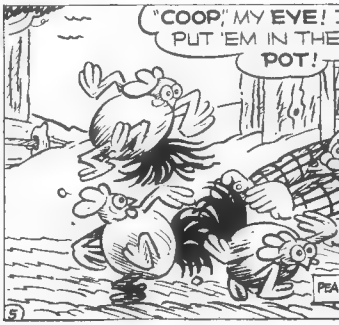

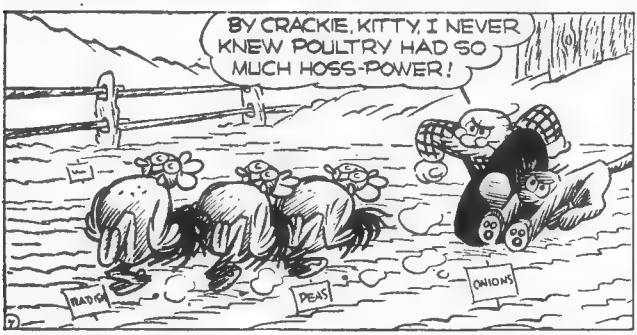

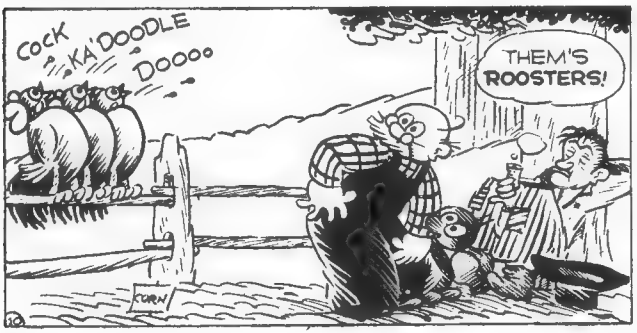

WOT TH'—? I DIDN'T ORDER NO CHICKENS!
PEAS
I DID, DEARIE, I GUESS IF YOU KIN RAISE A "VICTORY GARDEN," I KIN GROW MY OWN EGGS!
PEAS
I'LL
NO, NO, PAW! NO!!
YOU HEAR ME, PAW PERKINS? CUT IT OUT!
PEAS
THEM AIN'T ROAD-RUNNERS, NEIGHBOR!
THAT WAS ONLY A FIGGER OF SPEECH, STRANGER, YOU DON'T HAFTA TELL ME THEY'RE HENS!
THEY HAINT HENS, BUDDY!
CORN
E EGGS IS SIXTY IGHT TA BE
DON'T BE SO MODEST, MAW!
ANY OLE TIME ONE O' THESE BABIES LAYS A EGG, YOU KIN NAME YOUR OWN PRICE!
LIFE SIDEBRETT · G·G Copr 1961 King Features Syndicate Inc

POLLY AND HER PALS
By CLIFF STERRETT.
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HEH, HEH, IMAGINE MAW TRYIN' TO RAISE EGGS WITH THREE ROOSTERS!
AH, BUT SHE SWAPPED TWO OF 'EM FOR A BROODIE HEN AN' A SETTIN' OF EGGS
BEANS
SHE T
NIGH
AN'
I WON'T DISTURB HER, ASH, I JEST WANNA TAKE A SQUINT!
HEH, HEH, THERE SHE BE, SNUG AS A BUG IN A RUG!
ONE OF NATURE'S MARVELS, SETTIN'-HENS
ONCE THEY SET DOWN, THEY DON'T MEAN MEBBE
HEY, HALF-
QUIT HECKLI
THAT HEN!
WIND-BAGS IS POISON FER POULTRY, PAW! THEY'RE ALLERGIC TO EAR-BENDERS!
CALM YERSELF, SUSIE, I AIN'T UPSET THE BIRD A BIT!!

PHONED FARMER FINK LAST
T AN' HE BRANG THE HEN
TOOK THE ROOSTERS!
WHERE'S SHE AT? I AIN'T SEEN A SETTIN'-HEN IN AGES!
OUT IN THE COOP, BUT SHE AIN'T SUPPOSED TO BE ANNOYED, UNK!
BEANS
HEH, HEH, DON'T BE A 'FRAIDY-CAT, KITTY, WILD-HOSSES COULDN'T BUDGE HER OFF'N HER NEST!
WIT!!
N'
!!
HECKLE, HECK!! I WAS COMPLIMENTIN' THE CRITTER
6-13
ARE YOU SURE?
POSITIVE, MAW! I NEVER SEEN SECH A CONTENTED PAIR OF EYES IN ALL MY BORN DAYS!!
BEANS
CLIFF STERRETT

POLLY AND HER PALS
By CLIFF STERRETT.
Registered U. S. Patent Office
NO WONDER YOU FEEL FUZZY, THE WAY YOU'VE BEEN HITTIN' THE HIGH-SPOTS
THIS WAY, DOC! HERE'S YOUR PATIENT
A FELLER YOUR AGE CAN'T EAT A HULL MINCE-PIE WITHOUT PAYIN' THE PIPER
TUESDAY Y'COME CREEPIN' HOME FROM PETE'S POOL PARLOR AT THREE A.M.!
IT'S A WONDER HE LIVES AN' BREATHES, THE WAY HE BURNS THE CANDLE AT BOTH ENDS
NUTHIN' WRONG WITH YOU, BUT NERVES, SAMBO!
GITS ALL HET UP, BOWLIN', AN' THEN SETS IN A DRAFT!
THERE'S NO FOOL LIKE A OLD FOOL, 'SPECIALLY, WHEN HE WAS BALMY TO BEGIN WITH!
THESE SLEEPING-PILLS WILL MAKE A NEW MAN OF SAMBO, SUSIE!

THE OLD MUTTON-HEAD'S PASSED HIMSELF OFF FER LAMB, ONCE TOO OFTEN!
SAY, AH!
AH!
AND WEDNESDAY YOU AN' YER POKER PALS WAS UP IN YOUR DEN TILL DAWN!
ACE AND IET ARE YOU NEED!
ARE YOU KIDDIN'?
SMOKES LIKE A CHIMNEY AN' WONDERS WHY HE'S WOOZIE!
TRY TO GET IT WITH HER HOLLERIN' HER HEAD OFF!
THANKS, DOC. HOW MANY SHALL I GIVE HIM?
THEY HAIN'T FER HIM, HANG IT! YOU TAKE 'EM!
? ? ?
12
CLIFF STERRETT.
7-11

POLLY AND HER PALS
By CLIFF STERRETT.
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WHY MUST YOU ALWAYS SET UP ALL NIGHT AFTER A PARTY, PAW? COME T'BED!
M'M'M' YEAH! JUST A MINUTE, MAW!
1
2
BAM
O.K., BRUDDER, YOU ASKED FOR IT!
4
5
I WAS RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF A MARVELOUS NIGHT-MARE AN' ALL THE TIME I KNOWED IT WAS A NIGHT-MARE!
?
7
Y'MEAN, YOU WAS DREAMIN' AN' KNEW YOU WAS DREAMIN'?
8
WAL, WOT'S ALL THEM HOLES IN YOUR HAT?
DID YOU SAY HOLES?
10
YEAH! THEY APPEAR TO HAVE GONE IN THE FRONT AN' OUT THE BACK!
11

REACH, BUDDY! DIS IS A STICK-UP!
A STICK-UP, EH? HEH, HEH, THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK
YOU HEARD ME - GIT 'EM UP!
3
BAM
BAM
BAM
BAM
FER TH' LOVE OF PETE, PAW, WOT GOES ON?
AW, SHUX! WOTCHA WANNA WAKE ME UP FOR?
6
T'S RIGHT! OU HADDA AN' SPOIL T!
WHAT WAS ALL THE SHOOTIN' ABOUT?
THEM WAS ONLY BACK-FIRES THAT I HEARD IN MY SLEEP, WHICH GIMME THE NIGHT-MARE
9
?
BOP!
12
CLIFF STERRETT. 7-18-
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